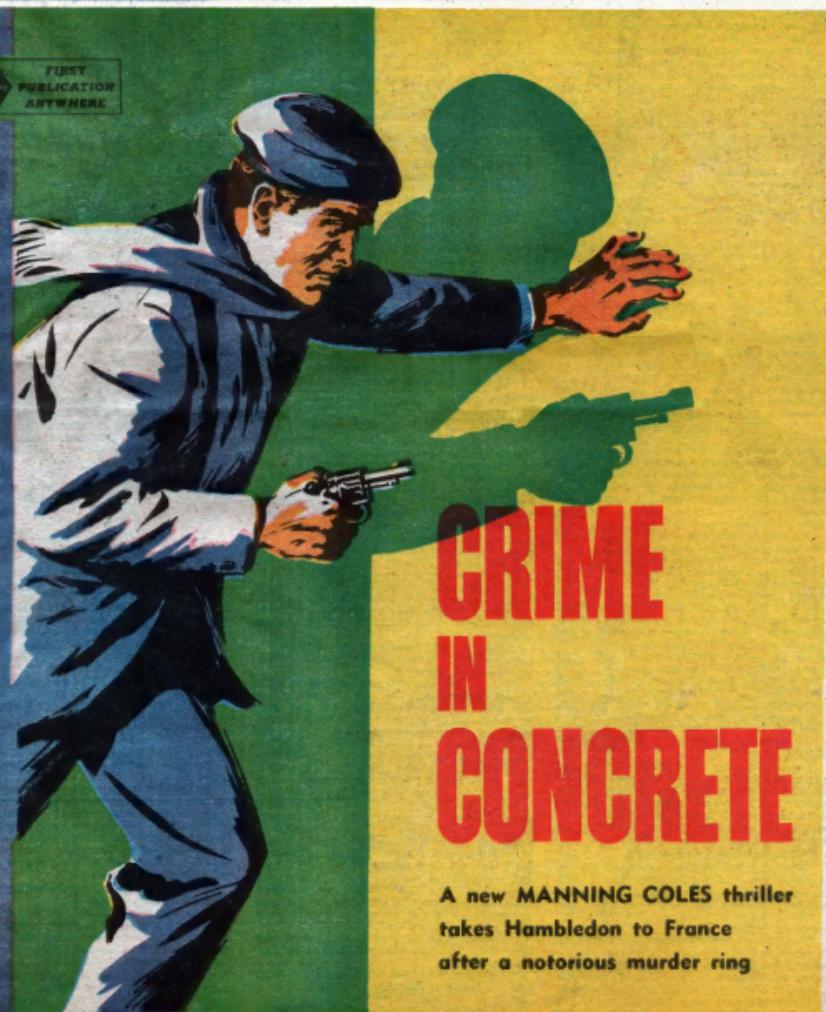


STAR WEEKLY
COMPLETE NOVEL

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A new MANNING COLES thriller
takes Hambledon to France
after a notorious murder ring

CRIME IN CONCRETE

Illustration by Russell Maelius

IT was a wet, dark night and the Steppen streets were dark and wet. Water which reflected light from grey streaks upon the ground and made every shadowed doorway and narrow entry a pit of darkness.

A man came along the main street, walking fast but surprisingly quiet. He wore a Mackintosh but, turned up around his neck and a belt had pulled down over his eyes, as was natural for such a man. He had also, round the side turnings where he was caught, by a tall man walking faster still, who took the first man by the arm and spoke confidentially in his ear in a soft and even kindly voice.

"George, it is George, yes? I thought it was, yes. I am most sure about it, but you must realize that you know me much."

There was a sharp crack which might have been a motorcycle engine backfiring, and George fell to the ground with a queer noise between a yelp, and a grunt. The soft-spoken man, still holding his gun, bent over him to see if a second shot were necessary. But the door of the public-house had opened at the moment of the first shot and a soldier in the uniform of a harpooner had come in.

"Harr!" he bellowed, "this is Cyprus Murder!" He made a rush at the man with the gun, who promptly tried to stop it upon him and fired again.

As though the name of murder were a releasing spell, the street awoke to life. Windows were flung up, the public-house customers, roused by the both-downs, the shouting and the noise, came out and had just turned a corner 50 yards away put his whistle to his lips and blew as he ran.

The gunman turned and ran the way he had come, easily outstripping the Anchor's customers, who were taken by surprise and delayed by falling over the soldier who had been brought low by a bullet.

Three hours later, Chief Superintendent Bagshot rang up Thomas Hambledon at the foreign office.

"I've heard a rather odd story," said Bagshot, "and it seems as if it might be more your business than mine. Do you know Tranter? George Tranter, the safe-breaker?"

"I've heard him, yes. Why?"

"Recriminants tried to kill him in Steppen three nights ago, and he's willing to talk."

"Oh, no," said Hambledon incisively.

"This time is different. I'm at the hospital now. Can you come? We've got him in a private room." Bagshot named the hospital and added: "He's been desperately ill now. He's been up behind Tranter's back, took hold by the arm and shot him at point-blank range. Tranter, however, was carrying case of the nicest kits of safe-breaking tools I've ever seen in my life in a neat little wallet no bigger than a cigar case and the bullet was deflected off these tools and did not penetrate too deeply. It finished up in his left shoulder. He's more or less about as strong as his son, than his injuries. Oh, no, I'm not charging him with carrying them but I couldn't let him keep them, could I?"

"I suppose not, poor man. I refer to Tranter. All right, I'll come."

Tranter was lying in an excessively tidy bed in an austere little room with a large pink console sitting by his bed. He was a tall, thin man with Bagshot and Hambledon came in the comfortable tried to stand smartly to attention and fold a newspaper at the same time with the result that his pencil fell and rolled across the floor.

"All right, Wilcox," said Bagshot.

"We'll finish that crossword later," said Tranter, grinning widely. "Good afternoon, gentlemen. Wilcox and me were just practising to improve our word-power, as they say."

"What happened on Monday night?" prompted Bagshot.

"Monday night, yes. You know, gentlemen both, it's such a new idea for me to start singing the police, if you'll pardon my mentioning your profession, Mr. Bagshot, sir, that I hardly know how to begin." Tranter shifted awkwardly in bed and his lips tightened with pain. "I think that still I can't hardly move. Well, it's like this. I come on some-

thing as I reckon should be stopped and you've always dealt very fairly with me, Mr. Bagshot, when we've met before on matters of business."

"Why not begin at the beginning?" suggested Hambledon. "What started all this?"

"Well, the first I heard was that two men was asking about for someone as could open a safe when the keys was not to be come by and someone else mentioned my name. I thought it was a story line. So I told the two of them and told them a story about some commercial designs as had been pitched from the inventor so as someone else could make a fortune out of it and the poor inventor he frozen out and not get a penny for all 'is' hard work. I was to open a safe and git these designs out so as the real inventor could rush 'em on to the patients office. I told them all that."

"Did you believe all that?" asked Hambledon.

"Well, no, being naturally the unbelieveable kind, but it didn't seem much of my business. I was offered a job and the rate of pay was quite astonishing to me. So I said all right and where was it? They'd certainly got all the design plan of the safe, plus the grounds, all the time I had to work to get in everything. Type of 'em an' all. It was one of those big rich 'ouses down at Windlesham where all the nobbs live. It had to be done on a certain night, last Monday, in fact." Tranter grinned at Bagshot. "I don't mind telling you all this business, you see I didn't do it. On the very night of the night I told them, I read in the paper about an American atomic guided missile or self-aiming missile—one of them things—anyway, the paper said this American gent was bringing the gun over to share it with us, see? The British, I mean. And the address where 'e' was staying was this Windlesham 'ouse, you see."

"And you was standing for pinching what was meant to 'elp us and 'anding it over to a bunch of lousy foreigners from God knows where. So, when I saw them that afternoon by appointment like, to fix up final details, I just told 'em the deal was off an' they could buy a tin-opener at Woolworth's and do the job themselves. They began to blawer in bit but I just walked off and left them. I know I was from another country, isn't it? A man ain't got to do a job if he don't want to."

"Certainly not," said Bagshot. "That is, unless he is in a place where he is under lawful authority?"

"Now I do think that's uncalled-for, bringing in these un'appy reminiscences at such a pleasant meeting."

"Bagshot," said Hambledon reproachfully. "A policeman should be courteous and tactful," Tranter, what happened that night?"

"I'd been in a pub with some of the boys 'aving a game of darts, look, and as it was one of these silly places as shuts at 10—why can't they make up their minds?—I was sitting at a table. A full night, and looking like Niagara. I was just coming up to the Anchor as doesn't shut till 11 past and I was arguing with myself about whether I'd drop in there for just one more or whether I'd go straight 'ome and get my wet things off when someone comes up behind and takes my arm, friendly like. 'George,' he says, 'it is George, yes?' Come on, I says, 'who it was, I don't know, he's gone.' Ends every sentence with 'ye' or 'no' like 'e' was telling you what he wants you to say back. Very apologetic 'e' was, so terribly sorry 'e' didn't know what to take for it, but I knew so much and with that there's a bang and something 'me' in the ribs, blimey, like being kicked in the t'winkles atomic-powered army men. I was lying on the floor of me, I went down and cracks my 'ead on the wall or something and when I woke up I was 'ere."

"Tranter," said Hambledon, "tell me all you know about this man, will you? Was he the only one you met?"

"There was two of 'em but the other one didn't talk to me, only to Jones."

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"Jones?" "In what 'is name was and 'e says 'Jones,' just like that."

"Did you hear them call each other anything?"

"Not to know 'at, they was talking French—I think."

"You're not sound?"

"Well, it sounded like French," said Tranter doubtfully, "but it could be wrong. I can't speak the language myself."

"Now these two men, can you describe them? Take your time."

"Jones," said Tranter. "A tall, slim bloke, well, taller than me. Five ten or eleven. Five ten, I think he looks taller than 'e' really is. Got one of those square-jawed jewbonds with one each side, know what I mean? Colossal 'is ears, bushy eyebrows, skin, everything. Oh, yes, 'e' probably say I'd say, no particular color. One ear sticks out, the—left, yes. No, no scars, at least, not where I could see 'em. Got lines down 'is cheeks, not from 'is nose, to 'is mouth like Mr. Bagshot's but 'alf way across like that," said Tranter, drawing a finger down his own cheek.

"A jolly good description," said Bagshot warmly.

"Excellent. We shall have to have you in the force."

"Oh, don't make me laugh," said Tranter weakly, "it 'urts my ribs. Got that all down, 'ave you?"

"Yes, thank you. Now, the other man?"

"Medium height, about the same as 'e' is. Dark hair, dark eyes, dark skin—I don't mean colored, just sort of grubby. Looked as though 'e' never did get a real clean shave. Stout. Not not stout, more what you'd call solid. Dark clothes, dark 'at. Sort of man you see 'im by the 'undred anywhere. Sorry, can say I 'ave a lot of 'em round 'ere. Get me 'im. It was 'asome as about as you'll find 'imself, foreigner."

"I'll come again," Tranter," said Hambledon, shaking hands with him. "You're safe here, get well quickly."

"Oh, I'm fine now they've picked all the bits out," said Tranter cheerfully. "By the way, I like grapes."

"It's a pity we didn't get that description earlier," said Bagshot, as they walked away. "We might have picked them up. We'll have a look even now, of course, but I expect they've left, the country days ago."

"Left the same night, if they've got any sense," said Hambledon, as they walked on. "The description reminds me of a man called Magid, 'e' was. Magid he mixed up with that international crowd, you know, in fact he's pretty international himself. He's not French by descent, he's a Middle European of some kind. Comes from Marseilles."

"I suppose the French police couldn't supply a photograph, could they?"

"They won't be on the dossier I saw. Let me show you what I've in Paris."

"That's a pity."

"I've had an idea," said Hambledon suddenly. "Excuse me, I'll see you later."

He turned on his heel and disappeared in the crowd.

By this time it was evening, the business of the day was over and the business of the evening had begun. Hambledon went into the crowded area of London which is called Tower Hamlets—presumably Steppen was once one of these hamlets—and wandered about looking for a man. Not such an impossible task as it sounds since the man was very well known in his own area.

He had once been semi-professional on a daily paper, brilliantly clever and making a name for himself. Now he was known simply as Chancery Charlie. He spent his evenings shifting from one public-house to another with a loose-leaf sketch book under his arm, doing lightning sketches of the customers for the price of a drink.

Hambledon was from one of Chancery's habitual public houses, call to attention, hearing that the artist had a bad evening and might conveniently remain soberly sober. A stall-keeper had seen him come

out of the Crown, an amusement arcade barker had sent him into the Red Room, a policeman on his beat had observed him entering the Coach and Horses.

"Oh, dear," said Hambleton. "Was he—or more or less all right?"

"He was weaving a bit," said the constable, "but he was all right so far as I could see."

A few minutes later he sent him 20 minutes earlier in the Star. "Don't you know it? Down the road, second turning on the left past the brewery. You can't miss it."

Hambleton sighed and plodded on. At least it was a fine night, it wasn't raining.

He came within sight of the Star, which appeared to be advertising an alteration upon its doorway. As he drew near, the little group of people parted and a figure emerged from among them which staggered across the pavement, tripped over its own feet and fell flat on its back in the gutter.

Hambleton picked him up, supported him, and said, "Really, Charlie!" in an exasperated voice.

Hambleton signalled a taxi which happened to be passing—he was always lucky with taxis—and pushed Charlie inside.

"Where we going?"

"To my flat," said Hambleton, and gave the driver his address.

One of the taxi drivers helped the porter to convey Charlie to the lift and Hambleton helped the porter to his own door.

After half an hour of Hambleton's well-practised attentions, Charcoal Charlie sleepily stretched himself and stood up.

"Heaven knows how you did it," he said. "I've never seen a man go up quickly in all my life. And we've met some experts in my time. What happens when the effects wear off?"

"You get sleepy, you retire to bed and sleep for about 14 hours at a stretch, that's all. It's a sort of Mickey Finn in reverse and I get it made up for me in Paris. Listen, Charlie. Can you draw a portrait from a description?"

"I've done it six or seven or three times, but as I never saw the original, I don't know how good they were. It depends a lot on how good the description is."

"Of course. Listen to this."

Hambleton read out Tranter's description of his assassin, then he and Charlie's face lit up. He snatched out his sketch book and sat down at the table. Beneath his rapid crayon a face flashed into life on the paper, a face strongly Scandinavian in the wide, jutting jawbones and faintly Slavonic in the flatness across the eyes where the orbital hollows were almost entirely absent. The nose was a long, thin, slightly curved affair, dimpled either cheek, but the stevenest thing about the drawing was the cold and ruthless falsity which showed plainly through the apparent friendliness of expression. Hambleton looked at the portrait with something like awe. Charlie paused for a moment, staring vaguely into space, and then made a rapid alteration which turned the subject's left ear out and away from the head.

"Well?" he said, and let his crayon down.

"Charlie, what the hell made a man like you take to drink?"

"Oh, just things. Would this be a portrait of the man who tried to murder poor Tranter?"

"You don't give me that!"

"I saw them together at the Spotted Duck one night last week, Thursday or Friday—Friday, I think. I went in there and saw George sitting at a table in the corner with two men, and this was one of them. Interesting face, I thought. I should have liked to go over and offer to draw him, but since they were strangers to Tranter's company I thought it more tactful to keep away. They might have been talking business, you know."

"They were," said Hambleton drily. "The other man, what was he like?"

"Never saw his face," said Charlie. He flicked over the page and started again on a three-quarter back view of a square, solid figure with a thick neck, leaning forward over a table. "Most uninteresting the little I did see, stupid-looking lump of dough."

"Look, Charlie, could you draw a couple more men of that other man's type? Quite like him, you know, but just that little bit different."

"Physically or psychologically? Look," said the artist, starting another drawing, "Portrait of Mr. X as he might have been if he'd grown up a good

citizen instead of a menace. Very fancy picture, this."

It was uncanny and Hambleton said so. There were the same features but this time the man was frank, honest and obviously kind. As a portrait of Louis Magid it was practically unrecognizable.

On the following morning Hambleton went back to the hospital with Charlie's drawings and a bunch of grapes. Tranter welcomed him warmly. "I've brought you some pictures to look at," said Hambleton, and gave him Charlie's drawing of Louis Magid and the two others which were very like him.

"That's 'em," said Tranter, unhesitatingly picking out the first which Charlie had done. "That's 'em in the life. These others, not so good, but that one—Charcoal Charlie do these?"

"Yes."

"Ah, I remember now. Charcoal come into the Spotted Duck, while me and those two were talking. Arly looked at us, e didn't, an' then come up with that answer, 'No, sir, ain't it?'"

Hambleton left him absorbing grapes and went to see Letord.

"My department had quite a session this morning about the man who attacked Tranter," said Hambleton. "They are very interested in him, very. They think he is a bigod and they are sending him to Paris in the hope that he will not put me on his track. By the way, have a look at this drawing. Tranter says it's 'im to the life. Could you get it photographed for me? My department would like some copies, too."

"You shall have it. Why is your august department so interested in this fellow?"

"I told you last night that I thought he was working for that international gang they call the d'Alroy Circus. They have been going for some years now. They started off by stealing confidential papers and selling them to the highest bidder, they progressed from there to blackmail and from blackmail to murder—and I don't know which is the fouler crime—"

Writing Cales is not one person, but two—the British writing team of Alistair French and Guy Manning and of Cyril Hare. Miss Manning served in the British War Office during the First World War, but has since, by her own admission, been "independent." Mr. Cales has been an engineer, ship's steward, dishwasher, painter, and a general practitioner. He spent two years in the infantry on wartime service and three more in military intelligence.

"I do," said Bagshot grimly. "Blackmail. It isn't quite so simple as murder but it's a lot dirtier."

"You should know. Twice lately the Circus have taken to kidnapping, and nobody knows who these leaden-faced men are. They are parasites from it's probably Paris, most of this sort of thing is worked from there. I'm going across to see if I can get in on the line somewhere."

"When are you going across?"

"Tomorrow. Can I have that photograph tonight? Thank you, you could add to your already unsurpassed courtesy by putting it around by hand to my flat and time after 9?" Splendid. "Good-bye, Bagshot. I'll send you a picture postcard of the Eiffel Tower."

* * *

Hambleton went straight from the Gare du Nord to see Letord at the Quai des Orfèvres and told him the whole story. Letord listened in silence with the photograph of Charlie's portrait propped up in front of him.

"Yes," he said when Hambleton had finished, "yes, I know about this man. I thought that he was dead in Marseilles. There was a body found under some rubble which had Magid's papers in its pockets but there were reasons why the face was not recognizable."

Letord lifted one of his telephones and asked whether Insp. Colin was still on the premises. "He is? Good. Ask him to come up to my room."

"He is not one of my men," explained Letord, putting back the telephone receiver. "He is of the Marseilles police. He is here making inquiries."

"He is known. Must it be worth asking?"

"Certainly," said Hambleton as the door opened and the inspector came in.

"Ah, Colin," this is Monsieur Hambleton from London. I don't think you have met Insp. Colin from Marseilles. Colin, look at this portrait. Do you recognize it?"

The Inspector's mobile face darkened. "Louis Magid."

"You know him personally?" said Hambleton.

"But yes, monsieur. In Marseilles. I had him pointed out to me and it is not a face one forgets. Then, one night, I passed him in the street; he was westward and I stopped him. It was not after that that I found the child, with the shooting bullet between her still in her mouth. So then we looked for Magid and it was soon after that that we found a man's body under the rubble, with Magid's papers in his pocket. My superiors thought that it was his but I was not satisfied. However, mere inspectors do not argue with their official superiors." He smiled at Letord and then looked at the photograph again. "This is an excellent likeness. May I ask where and when it was made?"

"A few days ago in London."

"Indeed, monsieur? So it would seem that I was right. Is it known where he is now?"

"We think he is no longer in England. He made a number of contacts upon a man who is himself a criminal but who is a decent fellow and well liked. So not only are the police looking for him but the underworld also."

"He would have to leave the country, then." agreed Colin. "Do you think there is a good chance that he is come to Paris?"

"I think about who knows where it will lead me?"

"Precisely, monsieur."

"Thank you, inspector," said Letord. When Colin had left the room, Letord added: "There is your identification at least. Now you want us to catch him for you, do you?" By the way, may I have a copy of this portrait?"

"I brought this over for you. And I don't want him arrested, Letord. I want him left at liberty to go on his own way and make his own contacts. I should like so be informed if he is seen so that I can follow him, that is all."

"Very well. I will turn my people on to looking for him and if they see him you shall be informed." "Thank you very much. By the way, Magid does not know me."

"Remain unknown, my friend, I beg of you."

Hambleton spent three days in Paris renewing old contacts, making fresh ones and wondering whether or not he had better pack up and go somewhere else.

He met a man named Jules whom once, several years before, he had been able to extract from an extremely awkward situation. They sat in the back of a cafe to talk about old times and new crimes, and Hambleton learned a good deal which might be useful. Eventually Hambleton asked a most casual question: whether Jules had ever come across a man named Magid.

"No," said Jules instantly, "no." Louis Magid? I never heard the name, what does he?"

"Then how did you know his name was Louis?"

"I must have heard it somewhere—one hears names mentioned, monsieur knows. I don't know anything about him."

"What is this?" asked Hambleton. "All I wanted to know was whether he is in Paris. He was in London lately but he has left there, and I should like to know where he has gone."

"Listen, monsieur," said Jules earnestly. "Let monsieur leave Magid alone, do me. None of us to be mixed up with Magid or have anything to do with him."

"Very well, the people behind him, Jules?"

"I don't know and that is the truth! I know nothing about them and that I don't want to."

Hambleton left it at that, if Jules would not talk, there was no way of making him, but at least it seemed that Magid was in Paris.

When Hambleton returned to his hotel in the evening he was called from dinner to the telephone. One of Letord's drivers had just seen a man from England for whom monsieur was important had been seen entering a cafe called the Canson d'Or in the Rue des Taffeliers in the Bastille area.

"At last," said Hambleton to himself. He abandoned his dinner, picked up his hat and went out.

CHAPTER II

"I SAW him plainly," said Hambleton to Letord in the morning. "It is Louis Magid. There is no doubt about it. He was still in that markedly inferior cafe when I got there. He crossed the Rue du Faubourg St. Antoine after he

came out, and there I lost him. 'Never mind, there is always tomorrow. You will tell your hawk-eyed minnow, will you?'

Hambledon, dressed in a manner more suited to his company, made a habit of leaving his hotel by the back entrance. He spent a couple of days and nights wandering in the depressed manner about the Basilia, looking for Magid and occasionally seeing him, always in the same district.

"It seems that Magid does not stray far from home, wherever 'home' is," said Hambledon, reporting to Lestord. "Sometimes he has a man with him, not always the same one. Yesterday's playmate could be today the other man who was with him in London. Or maybe he has a gang of million men who go about looking like that. Tonight I'm afraid I behaved in a mild way. I went into a cafe he goes to sometimes. I thought he might come in and he did, but unfortunately he had a fellow with him whom I had met before under unfriendly circumstances. Beppi le Chien, remember? I thought he was in jail."

"He finished his sentence and came out," said Lestord. "I trust he did not see you."

"He did, yes. Whether he pointed me out to Magid I don't know, they were talking closely together and Magid looked around several times, but he was always doing that."

Two evenings later Hambledon saw Magid come out of the same cafe, but he did not follow him. He was alone and Hambledon was reasonably sure that he himself had not been seen. Hambledon followed the man with every care and every art which long patience had taught him and finally had the satisfaction of seeing Magid turn in under an archway which led to a tiny and very dirty courtyard. Hambledon followed him. He passed the arch and appeared to be completely enclosed by the buildings around it and met to have any other exit. Magid, therefore, must have entered some one of the doors and he within some building: two hours later he had still not come forth again.

Hambledon went home. He had breakfast late the following morning—even he had to sleep sometimes—when he was called to the telephone; at the other end was Lestord, saying that he thought Hambledon would find a visit to the Prefecture interesting and possibly informative. "We have Beppi le Chien."

"I'll be right there," said Hambledon.

* * *

"What has Beppi done this time? Or did he rush into your door crying 'Shield me from the oppressor'?"

"At bottom, it was more like that," said Lestord. "He was leaving Paris."

"Why did he want to leave Paris?"

"That is precisely what you propose to ask him. I have no objection if it occurs to me that you would like to be present."

A few minutes later the door opened and Beppi le Chien was shown in. Lestord sent away the attendant constable and started at once.

"You were arrested this morning at Versailles, accused of being in charge of a stolen motor van."

"I was not in charge, monsieur, and Beppi le Chien was not firmly in evidence. I was only a passenger in the thing. I did not even know it had been stolen."

"Oh, then how did you come to be sitting in it?"

"Because I wanted to leave Paris."

"There are trains," pointed out Lestord.

"I wish to go to Marseilles, monsieur, and I have not got the money, all the way. So I said to myself that I would go to the Hautes and beg a lift from one of the produce lorries as far as possible and then perhaps I could buy a railway ticket for the rest of the way."

"I see. Now will you tell me why you were in such a hurry to leave Paris?"

"It was the same in which I found myself entangled. I do not like those people, not! They get me into trouble two years ago at Dijon, you will remember, monsieur. There was a man killed, but I had nothing to do with the murder. Indeed, I was cleared of that charge, monsieur."

"I remember. The man who did it died in the prison hospital of influenza, I believe it or not," said Lestord to Hambledon. "So we were spared the trouble of trying him. So you ran into some of the going again, Beppi, did you?"

"One man in particular, yes, but he had others with him."

"What is the name of the man who accosted you?"

"—I think he has several—"

"One of them Louis Magid?"

"That is so, monsieur."

"What do you know about this gang?"

"But nothing, monsieur. He and his friends have a little scheme on hand and they want a reliable man to do it. Then I tell them I don't want a job. I've never done it, but he takes notice, but he never does. What will he tell in two days what I am to do, and where, and when, so I spend my spare time keeping out of his way, but last night I waited for me coming from work and said 'Tonight at the Carlton at 21 hours.' So I go up and spend the night in a bistro off the Boulevard de Magenta and I am so afraid to come out again that I am too late and miss the lorry, and you know the rest."

"Where does he live, do you know?"

"I was told he has a room on the first floor in a little court off the Passage Stivinié, but I do not know if it is true. It is opposite to a tailor's I work in. And now may I leave Paris?"

"I don't see why we should wish to keep you," said Lestord.

"I should certainly agree, if you don't want him," said Hambledon. "A man who wants to keep out of trouble—"

"Should be encouraged," finished Lestord. "You must not be seen leaving here, Beppi—"

"I am not, monsieur. I think it is farther south. Not Marseilles or I would go somewhere else! Somewhere central, I do not know, but when we do that job at Dijon I had the idea the centre was not far away. I don't know what gave me the idea."

"Some person like 'Run over and see monsieur le chef, it won't take long,'" suggested Hambledon.

"Something like that, I can't remember. It was just an idea. Not Dijon itself, I don't think so anyway."

On the next night Magid came out of the courtyard arch and passed within six feet of Hambledon within a broken doorway. The man had a relaxed air for once, as he went by he was whistling tunelessly by his teeth; Hambledon waited 10 minutes, walked quietly along the passage inside the archway. Before he had taken three steps a man came up behind his shoulder, close enough to touch him. He was near an open door.

Hambledon turned like a flash and hit the man under the jaw, following it with another even harder under the eyes. The man slumped to the ground and the couch which he carried rolled away into a dark corner. Hambledon followed him, at the first landing of the house a door faced him which looked as though it were habitually used; another in the corner had had its handle removed and upon examination proved to be locked. A few seconds' work with tools and the first door swung quietly open upon a dark and silent room.

Hambledon went in, gun in hand and listening intently for the slightest sound, but there was none. He was in the act of locking the door when he still heard the sound of Turkish tobacco smoke. Magid always smoked Turkish cigarettes. There was an ashtray full of cigar stubs, mainly Turkish, but also a few Gauloises. Magid had had a visitor, and why not? Still Hambledon felt uneasy though there seemed no reason for it, because there was no one in the room except the two of them.

He examined the room carefully, but there were no papers of any kind, not a card, not a letter, not even a book. Hambledon's little pencil torch began to fail, he remembered seeing a book of matches in one of the table drawers he had searched so he took it out and pocketed it sooner than find himself in the dark.

He was in the act of unlocking the door again from the outside when something hard and round was pressed against his ribs.

"If monsieur has quite finished, we should like a little word with him—"

* * *

Hambledon's gun was removed from his pocket and he was hustled down to the ground floor and down again to the cellar. A light was switched on within the cellar itself. Hambledon was pushed inside and the door bolted upon him. His captor then leaned against the outside of the door and talked to him through a grille.

"Monsieur no doubt thought himfself unobserved, but it was not so. I was in Louis' room looking out of the window when I saw monsieur come in through the archway. Michel came up behind him and monsieur knocked him down. Michel, he is still out cold."

The man stopped talking to light a cigaret, the smell of driftwood through the aperture and Hambledon immediately realized that he had napped at home in the room on the first floor. The smell of Turkish tobacco, that was true, but there was also and more recently the acrid smell of a Gauloise bleu.

Twenty minutes later there were steps on the stairs and the door opened to show him first a gun with a section of free hand and then the whole face which he recognized. Louis Magid entered the cellar with the other man at his heels.

"Hands up, monsieur, please," said Magid in that oddly soft voice of his: "Right up, above the head, and back against that wall, Gaston! The chains—"

Gaston was leaning against the door and came back again immediately with two long thin steel chain; both had a handcuff at each end. One was about 18 inches long and the other shorter, about a foot long only. The shorter one was used to shackle Hambledon's ankles together. Hanging from a staple on the wall was a third chain with a padlock on the free end. When this was locked around Gaston's wrists he could not shuffle a few inches either way and this was all. The other chain linked his wrists together like a long pair of handcuffs.

Gaston came with two packing cases and what could only be described as a golfing fust was made in it containing one of them in Hambledon's corner so that he could sit down and lean back against the wall without his legs dragging uncomfortably at his ankles.

"I am sorry for all this," purred Magid. "Our prison accommodation is horribly substandard but we do our best with the means at our disposal, such as they are. Gaston, search him."

Gaston did as he was bid and produced from Hambledon's pockets a couple of sovereign francs in assorted French currency, cigarettes and a lighter, two handkerchiefs, a book of matches and his burglar's wallet. This produced smacks of delight from Gaston.

"How beautiful are these tools! How well made of the best steel! Truly, with this kit one could open the strong-rooms of the Bank of France, Lou! Lou!"

"Where are his papers?"

"Monsieur is not carrying any," said Gaston.

"That is all that there was in his pocket."

"Oh, indeed. Monsieur, with respect, may I have your name and address?"

"King Kong," said Hambledon, and Magid shook his head.

"You shock me," he said sadly. "We will not discuss the subject further tonight, it is getting late and I am tired. Good-night, monsieur. Breakfast will be served in the morning. Good-night, Gaston. You can return to your own headquarters."

"One second," cried Gaston, dodging out of the doorway, "one little moment while there was no bed."

Hambledon leaned back in his corner, folded his arms and closed his eyes. He did not open them again until a scuffling sound announced the return of Gaston, loaded down with a bedding roll and a couple of blankets. As he entered, the door closed behind him and the bedding was tucked under some in their staples. Presumably Magid did that, for he was no longer in the room and quiet steps could be heard on the stairs.

Gaston straightened out the mattress on the floor and threw an extra blanket on it. If Hambledon thought that any of these comforts were for him he was mistaken. Gaston whistled "Auprès de ma blouse" with such infinite melancholy that the packing case was too soon to distract him for the night," he remarked, and hunted through his pockets. The first things he brought out were a couple of keys on a string, he saw Hambledon's eyes upon them and grimmed.

"You no need to worry about these," he said, and he threw back without having only to produce Hambledon's cigaret instead and, as Tomm noticed indignantly, his lighter. Gaston lit a cigaret for himself and leaned back comfortably.

"It is very pleasant," he said, "to have someone to talk to. It helps to pass the time. Of course, I'm not supposed to talk to monsieur, but who can sit in silence hour after hour? It is not reasonable,

that. Besides, what does it matter since monsieur is as one already dead? When they have asked him their questions, Louis will come down with his little gun, and that will be the end."

"Does this often happen?" asked Hambleton coldly.

"Oh, now and again, when it is necessary. Any one who is slightly drunk, he is dead really. Sometimes they are already dead when they come here, but I still have to watch over them though I can't think why. Still, I am glad to do what I'm told, so I do it. I had one about a fortnight ago and it was very dull. It was no good talking, really, because he couldn't answer."

"It must have seemed rather a long night," said Hambleton.

"Oh, I got tired of him after a bit and went to sleep and they woke me up bringing the barrel down in the morning. One can't let things get out of hand, can one?"

"The barrel? What for?"

"To put him in, of course. We bring down sand and cement and I mix them together dry, with a shovel. Monsieur must have seen it on building sites, yes. Three parts of sand to one of cement. Then we put it in the barrel—dry, yes—

and pour in buckets of water from that tap on the corner and stir it up with a broom handle, it's outside the door there but I don't suppose monsieur noticed that. Then we add a few more parts of sand, mixed like that, nice and sloppy. Then we push the body in and as it goes down the cement rises, being sloppy, you see, and covers it all up. Then we put the lid on, wait till it hardens and roll it down to the Seine. It sinks at once, of course, being heavy, and never rises again."

Grinning, another of Hambleton's cigarette. He did not offer it to their owner, and Hambleton would not ask for it. When it was done, Gaston lay down on the mattress, put his pillow under his head, rolled himself in both blankets and went to sleep. He also snored.

In the morning someone came down the stairs and shooed Gaston out of the room, sat on the floor and smoked a cigarette. The other was ordered to make a meal consisting of a tray bearing two clammy mugs of coffee and some thick slices of bread and butter.

"Breakfast, monsieur," said Gaston cheerfully. The other man, who had a swollen eye, was presumably Michel, merely scowled. The coffee was at least hot and the stale bread was soaked in a sort of Hambleton began to revive. At least, one might have hoped.

Presently a bumping noise was heard and Michel returned with a tall barrel which he rolled into the cellar and stood up near the tap in the corner. The barrel contained only a bucket, which he took out and set down.

He went out and returned again with two bags of cement, *fondu*, one at a time. Cement fizzes in the quick-setting variety and Hambleton found himself regarding it with increasing distaste. Michel came back again with two sizeable sacks of sand. They were tied up tightly at the top and were merely rolled down the stairs and drawn into the cellar by the two men together. All this time Michel had not spoken one word, he went out and shut the door behind him.

"Not very talkative, that one," Hambleton said. "Michel? But never. He can speak, he is not dumb. He is, however—how does Louis put it?—mentally substandard."

Gaston untied one of the sacks of sand, cut open one of the cement bags and made quite a large mess on the floor of a mixture from both. When he had thoroughly mixed that heap, he shovelled it all into the barrel and started another. There was no doubt that he was a conscientious worker.

"I think there is nearly enough," he said thoughtfully. "Monsieur will take up a good deal of room."

"Gaston?"

"Monsieur?"

"I have heard that when a man is to be executed he is given a glass of rum and a cigarette to calm his nerves."

"Als, monsieur, I have no rum, and monsieur's nerves appear to be completely calm already."

"But the cigarette, Gaston?"

"Yes, sir. I would like to see why monsieur should not have one if he wishes for it. I have always been of a generous nature, monsieur shall have one of mine." Gaston threw him one of his awful "blous." Hambleton caught it and put it in his mouth.

CRIME IN CONCRETE

"I have no light, Gaston."

"Of course not, I have monsieur's here."

Gaston flicked the lighter into flame, came across the room and held it to the end of the cigarette. It was the first time in all those hours that he had come within Hambleton's reach while they were alone.

Hambleton brought his hands up as though to steady the cigarette, flung the chain around the man's neck so as to encircle it, put his knee as high as it would go against Gaston's body and pulled with all his strength.

CHAPTER III

WHEN Gaston finally left off struggling and went limp, Hambleton let him drop to the floor, took the key of the handcuffs from his pocket and released himself from his chains.

Presently someone would come down. If it were Monsieur Louis Magid, one glance would tell them what had happened and there would be a fight. Possibly Hambleton's pistol was still in Gaston's pocket, but a search showed that someone had disarmed him. Still, there was the shovel, a very useful weapon. Hambleton took it out of the corner and set it ready to hand.

"There were some coins from monsieur le chef, and he was expected soon; it was just possible that he would not know so insignificant a person as the late Gaston. In which case—

Hambleton tore off his own jacket and crammed Gaston into it—he was still in his shirt sleeves. It was not worth while changing trousers also, those which Hambleton was wearing were shabby enough and a right fit. He took off his coat and buttoned them all over. But Gaston's jacket was of a memorable check and his cap went with it. Hambleton took them both and then began drawing buckets of water at the tap, pouring them into the barrel and frantically stirring the mixture with the broom handle. The cement mixture seemed to take on an insatiable appetite for water and still remained soft in the barrel. He labored at this until the water poured off him and the barrel was nearly half full, and quite suddenly the mixture went liquid like thick soup.

He lifted Gaston from the floor, heaved him up to the rim of the barrel and began to rish him in head downwards, but his coat sleeve caught on a nail.

Either the man who came were rubber soles or Hambleton had been too occupied to hear steps on the stair, for suddenly a bolt shot back and the door opened. Hambleton stepped back against his shovel, but the man was a complete stranger.

"What is all this?" he said angrily. "Who are you?"

"Give us a hand," growled Hambleton, "he's got stuck." He tugged furiously at the coat sleeve and freed it, and Gaston fell in until only his legs remained showing. "Come on, can't you? If this stuff begins to set—"

With the stranger's help the business was finished and the cement rose within a couple of inches of the rim of the barrel. Hambleton picked up the shovel, felt the shovel close behind him and wiped his face on his sleeve.

"That's all right," he said. "Now it's just to let it harden and put the lid on and we can roll him away."

"You blithering fool," stormed the other man, "is that the Englishman?"

"Englishman, was he? How was I to know? I was told to keep him quiet—"

"You were told to keep him safe—because we wanted to talk to him, idiot, and now you've killed him. I've a good mind to hand you over to the police for murder or execute you yourself—Magid's away for the day. Don't stand there gibbering like an idiot. Go and find Michel and bring him back here at once. Get out!"

Hambleton fled. First he rang up Letord's office and found him there.

"Letord, Hambleton here. I can't say much now, but after a couple of years here I don't much that about in the Passage Solitaire. There's a man there I want to see, tall, thin man with a crooked nose." He added further details of appearance and dress, and went on: "If he leaves there he may go to the Casino d'Or in the Rue des Tallendiers to look for a dirty little thing named Michel with two black eyes. He's not important, the

other man is. He's in the cellar of that place in the Passage Solitaire waiting for me to come back with Magid. I'll come along to you as soon as I can, right away if I'm lucky. Good-bye."

He hung up the receiver and stood for a moment in thought. Gaston's jacket was horribly conspicuous; someone might recognize it and wonder. He looked around. It was a small mirror on the wall and was horrified at what he saw. No taxi would receive such a filthy object in a nice clean taxi. He cleaned his face superficially with a handkerchief and walked out.

From the hat-stand he selected a long dark Mackintosh and a gray felt hat, elderly but passable. He stood in the doorway. With the coat collar up and the hat pulled down, he was much more presentable.

He strode away into the driving rain and five minutes later stopped a roving taxi.

When he reached Letord's office he dropped into a chair with a sigh of relief. Letord took one look at him and deferred holding him engagé.

"Thank you. You lost some, and if there were a plate of sandwiches with it—"

"There shall be."

Between bites, Hambleton poured out his story. Hambleton finished the last crust of sandwich, took out a cigarette and, in feeling for his lighter, came upon the little packet of book-matches from Magid.

"These came from there," he said. "But I fear they won't help. No local alibis, no useful hotel in the provinces to give us a lead, this only advertises *Gitanes Vizir* cigarettes." He opened the flat of the packet. Across the inside of it were scribbled two sets of numbers, one below the other, thus:

1541

"Dear me," said Hambleton, and passed it to Letord. "What would you think those represented?"

"Telephone numbers?" They could be, in a small town. Page in a fat book? A book of reference, for example. Index numbers in a library?

"Any thing. You may have it. Letord, Exhibit A. Well, I think I'll go and find a bed for the night."

"I'll send you back to your hotel or whistle up a taxi."

"No, thanks. Letord, I've been thinking. I look pretty scruffy already, another two days without shaving and my best friends won't wish to know me and I have a feeling that that may be useful. I think Ell get a bed at *Karriotti's* in the Rue de Charanton."

"But that's a *doss-house*!"

"I know. That's what I want. Let us be accurate, it's what I need. I want to sink without trace into the submerged tenth and come up with a new identity and background."

Two days later Hambleton returned, less conspicuously dressed but a great deal scruffer.

"You were right about *Karriotti's*; it is not a *three-star* hotel. First of all, did you have any bright ideas about those numbers on the book-matches?"

"Bright but not useful," said Letord.

"Oh. Because I've had one, though whether it's any use is another thing—say it isn't again?"

Letord took out *Exhibit A*, one packet book-matches handed him from the safe.

"Thank you," said Hambleton. "Now then, 1541 and 1929. Let's write them down here. Suppose we put a fullstop in the middle of each, thus, what happens?"

"Times?" said Letord. "Fifteen hours 41 minutes and 19 hours 29 minutes."

"It could be, couldn't it? Guessing again, could they?"

"I should imagine," said Letord, a little blankly, "that it would be even more surprising if they were not the times of some train leaving some place and arriving at some other place, but the choice is probably wide, is it not? Even assuming that they are train times at all."

"You know, says the Chief Supt. Bassicot ought to get out more widely. Remembering that this was last found in Magid's room and that Magid is in Paris, would one of these times refer to a Paris arrival, do you think?"

"Or a Paris departure?" said Letord, looking over Tommy's shoulder. "I could put a man on ringing up the various terminals in Paris to inquire."

CRIME IN CONCRETE

"Remembering again that our nervous friend, Beppe le Chien, said that this gang's headquarters are somewhere in the Midi—he mentioned Dijon—one might begin with the Lyon station, doesn't you think?"

"I might even start with that one myself," said Letord, returning to his desk and his telephone.

"Just a moment. The direct train, arrêtée, first-class-ferry, from 1929 is four hours, no, three hours 48 minutes. A place about three and three-quarter hours from Paris to which these train times apply one way or the other—"

"Give me your notes," said Letord, and applied himself to the telephone. "They say that you will look them up and ring me back," he finished, putting down the receiver.

"How kind people are, aren't they, when asked in the right way? How did your people get on in the Passage Stivinielle? I've been avoiding the place."

"Ah, yes. Your tall friend with the bent nose, he was still in that cellar when my train got there; half an hour later he had gone along to the Casino d'Or as you said he did. The woman he met there had two beautiful black eyes, again as you said. They sat together and engaged in converse for some time before returning to the house in the yard. Still later that night Magid went in and Michel came out, he went home to bed, and had a room nearby." He appeared to have nothing else to say, but then, after a moment's pause, he went back again to the yard and this time he was pushing a truck." Letord paused. "You wish for all these details?"

"Every single little tiny one."

"Very well. Nothing more happened until evening, after dark, when the three of them came to the yard, pushing a long truck which seemed to be heavy, for a man quite a struggle getting it up on the truck. My men followed them for a long, very long, walk right down to the Seine quays, the Quai de Bercy, along there somewhere. They went down an alley between warehouses. My men could not follow because the tall man had gone back, but Magid and Michel came back a few minutes later with the truck empty. They will get home."

The telephone rang and Letord answered it.

"A thousand thanks," he said finally. "I am most grateful." He replaced the receiver. "The train is now 1541 from Beaucé to Paris where it arrives at 1929 if it is punctual. My friend, you were surprised."

"I have my moments," said Tommy modestly. "Beaucé, eh? Now if the tall man with the unlucky nose can be traced to Beaucé or whereabouts, we shall really be getting somewhere. What's he name?"

"I shall find that today," said Letord. "The hotel will tell us. Now will you tell me, if indeed you know, what was in that barrel and what did they do with it? For my two men had to follow those men when they parted, and later, on the barrel was not to be found."

"It's in the Seine," said Hambleton. "I suppose you could fit it out, but you don't know that there would be any trouble, that it's quick-hardening cement and it's mad—what—36 hours now to set. I didn't give you all the details the other night, but, you see, they think I'm inside the cement."

"Hambleton—It take it there's only cement—"

"Oh no. Gaston is inside, the man that checked cost belonged to. He was a man of means, Gaston, and he was getting it ready for me. So I altered the arrangement. It didn't look so horrified, Letord. Think of all the trouble I've saved you."

CHAPTER IV

"**B**UT," said Letord, "quite apart from other irregularities, won't these people miss their Gaston?"

"Dear me, no, they think he's run away. You see, there's no doubt I had some luck. Bére-noe, who came into the cellar when I was parking Gaston, didn't know Gaston or, of course, me. He kindly lent a hand with the final stages but he was a simpleton. I want to say he never been given to answer questions of course, and he kept on telling me what would happen to me when monsieur le chef heard how stupid I'd been. So, naturally, I ran away. What do you mean by 'other irregularities'? It would have been far more irregular if I had been in that barrel instead of Gaston."

"You shall identify him for me in our Regues" Garry and we will mark him off 'deceased'."

"Splendid. 'So perish all traitors.' Well, I think that's all for the present. I am now going back to Kariotti's to ingratiate myself with my roommate, Victor Dinel. He is a street musician as a rule but at the moment he has been forced to pawn his accoutrements to buy food. He was hungry."

Monsieur Victor Dinel was a tall and stout man of uncertain age. He was normally cheerful and even-tempered, and Hambleton rather liked him.

Hambleton came up the worn stone stairs to their room and found him sitting on the edge of the bed, holding a small bone in his hand and his ancient bones. Dinel looked up, nodded and went on with his task. Hambleton sat down on the other bed, produced some pieces of bread and slices of cooked ham—not wrapped in paper—out of his coat pocket and began to eat slowly.

"Have you had a good meal?" asked Dinel.

"I was lucky enough to find these boar-laces."

"How greatly it improves the look of one's boots, a good pair of laces." He kept on glancing at Hambleton's food as he talked, and Tommy noticed it.

"I managed to get this," he said. "Will you care to share it?"

They shared the meal together.

"Tomorrow," said Dinel, "I must take steps to be in funds again. It is annoying to have no money. Humiliating, also."

"That is true," said Hambleton. "It is, I suppose, the penalty for living in a high state of civilization, the necessity for money."

The trouble with which Hambleton found it most difficult literally to stomach was the standard of food appropriate to his circumstances. He solved the difficulty by going off alone and buying a decent meal at least once a day. That evening he brought home a cooked chicken honestly paid for at a delicatessen and had it for his meal; Dinel had not noticed so Hambleton hid the food in their room and went out to look for him.

He was strolling along quietly, watching the passersby when Dinel dug out of a cafe and stopped him. Something had happened since the morning. Dinel looked cheerful, refreshed, and carefree.

"Come with me," he said. "I've had a lucky day. Last night you shared your supper with me so this evening I give you a drink. No, I will take no refusal and it shall be a good wine, a 1947 Beaujolais, not one of those dreadful tipplers of which the only pleasant thing is the label on the bottle. Come, my friend."

"Thank you, but just a glass," said Hambleton.

"Thank you, but just a glass," said Dinel. "I've had one glass each and Dinel proposed another.

"Not another," urged Hambleton. "Listen, Dinel. Today I, too, have been lucky. In our room at Kariotti's there is a cold chicken waiting for our supper."

"Grand ciel! My friend, it is plain that you are a practitioner of the first order. Magnificent! Just one more glass to celebrate this fortunate day."

"Let us go now," said Hambleton rising, "for I am hungry. I only waited for you before beginning to eat."

"You are a true friend. Just one more glass, I swear it shall be the last. Yes, I know I find it hard to stop but you have given me an incentive to make the effort. Just one more."

"Provided that it is really the last—"

"Look, I will pay for this one and then you shall have my wallet and then I cannot buy any more and we'll go home. Agree?"

Hambleton agreed, dug out his wallet and for Dinel handed over the wallet, very nice one indeed, made of crocodile skin and with silver corners. Dinel's principal source of income suddenly became obvious. Dinel was a pickpocket.

They plodded off toward Kariotti's. After a prolonged pause—

"Have you also," asked Dinel, "thought of wine?"

"No. One cannot have everything at once."

They walked on. Presently they came abreast of one of those mysterious archways which make up so much of the fascination of Paris. Dinel stopped.

"Wait for me a moment." He went in under the archway and disappeared from sight. Hambleton waited, idly looking about him, upon one side

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of the archway there was a cafe, and a horrible possibility occurred to him. He went inside the archway to see, if he could, where Dinel had gone; at the moment there was no sign of him but quite suddenly there was a yell and a rush and Dinel came tearing out with a bottle in his hand, followed by two other men, one of whom was a woman.

"Run!" said Dinel, brandishing the bottle. "Run!"

Hambleton turned and fled beside him, they ran out of the archway and straight into the arms of two policemen who enfolded them and held them tight. They were arrested, charged with theft, marched off to the nearest police station, searched and cuffed into cell together.

In the meantime they were roused carry, given coffee of a sort and stale rolls, and said that they would be taken before the French equivalent of a magistrate's court at 9.

They were led out at the appointed time and pushed into one of the small blue vans in which the police of Paris are wont to carry their犯人 to prison place to place.

In the meantime the driver was a hurry, he turned corners with a verve which shot the prisoners off the longitudinal benches on to the floor time and again.

"In this indeed a police wagon," asked Hambleton on the fourth occasion, "are we in a fire engine or a mistake?"

"He is trying to become a taxi driver," said Dinel gloomily, and at that moment it happened. The driver came up much too fast to a crossroads controlled by lights. At the last moment the light turned red and he jammed his brakes hard on. Hambleton and Dinel shot the length of the van to burst into the partition behind the driver and a vegetable sorry too close behind rammed the van in the back.

Dinel immediately threw himself down on the floor and groaned loudly, clutching himself around the ribs.

"Are you hurt?" asked Hambleton anxiously, and banged on the partition for attention.

"Not really, but we can't have a fuss we'll be taken to hospital for it, anyway. More comfortable than the cells. Groan, can't you?"

By this time a quite large crowd had naturally gathered, and as is normal in France, its sympathies were divided between the disputants. Hambleton and Dinel, lying screeching from view and Joe-goggin on the partition, left off screaming.

Hambleton dug Dinel in the ribs.

"Come on," said Dinel, "now's our chance. Run!"

"Not run," said Dinel, getting to his feet, "it attracts attention. Just slide away."

So they vanished around the nearest corner and when the ambulance arrived it found no patients to treat.

Dinel took Hambleton to another doss-house he knew, compared with Kariotti's was practically the Ritz. Hambleton stood it with distaste, scratched himself in intelligent anticipation and led Dinel aside.

"Listen. You'll have to lie low for a few days because the police know where we saw your papers. You can get out in safety, it is only to keep out of that area, away from those files."

"That is true. But we must have money, they took it all from us."

"I can get some—"

"Be careful!"

"I'll be safe."

Dinel nodded and went indoors while Hambleton took a devious route to the Quai des Orfèvres and Antoine Letord.

CHAPTER V

"**I** AM getting inside the skin of my part, as they say. When I turned in here and one of your men looked at me I nearly fainted."

"Would it?" said Letord, turning a chair around for Hambleton, getting him a drink and offering cigarettes in one smooth flow of uninterrupted movement, "would it be your conscience catching up with you?"

"I'm not a conscientious objector," said Hambleton, genuinely surprised. "Oh, you mean Gaston, do you? That wasn't murder, that was merely rat-extermination. Any news of the man with the crooked nose who supervised what he thought were my obsequies?"

"According to the hotel register his name is Jean Artaud of Paris, and the news his particulars are false. On the afternoon of the day before yesterday—yes, you were here in the morning—Artaud left

"Oh, I should think so," said the detective, and whipped out a lighter.

"That tall, thin man I was following, he has a bent nose," said Hambleton, stooping toward the flame. "I want to know where he goes, if you please. Thank you, monsieur," he added in a louder voice, and stepped back.

"Well, we'll train on Beaune and the detective, and walked off after Artaux while Hambleton returned to Dinel.

Much later, when they were making their leisurely way back to the Chien Enchaine for their evening meal, a young man in plain clothes brushed past Hambleton, leaving a slip of paper in his pocket.

"Well, it is train on Beaune but we lost him outside the station. We do not know him."

"You were speaking yesterday," said Hambleton, "of getting work in the vineyards. How good this rugat is!"

"Yes, indeed. Alexandre is fortunate in some respects."

"It is a very important respect."

"You are right. I make a few inquiries this morning, the vendange is beginning already."

"Is Beaune?"

"In Beaune, yes. You like Beaune?"

"I like its products," laughed Hambleton. "I am a stranger to the town itself but it would seem a good place in which to find a vineyard."

"I am not surprised. Beaune is all vineyards. Should we, then, move on there?"

"Tomorrow, perhaps?"

"Tomorrow, certainly," agreed Dinel. "We have, I feel, seen Dijon."

CHAPTER VI

BEAUNE is a charming town of immense age. Julius Caesar camped there 40 years before Christ was born in Bethlehem. Beaune is normally a quiet, sleepy place but not at the time of the vendange, the wine harvest. There are vineyards upon all the sunny open slopes and in every out-of-the-way corner there is laboring, man and woman, young and old and even children big enough to have a sense of responsibility.

For the first day or so, until his back was used to sleeping, Hambleton thought that the work would kill him. Dinel had done it before and stood up to it better. There was a way to do it, he said, one learned by experience.

The next day, however, Dinel and Hambleton were allowed to sleep in a one-rocined cottage, empty because the windows were out and the roof leaked when it rained, but there was a fireplace with a chimney to that they could cook for themselves if they wished, and they lay up in upon a large, stuffed with straw, bed.

It was the month of September and the evenings were drawing in so that the day's work ended fairly early. Hambleton was so tired on the first two evenings that he almost forgot why he was there, but on the third day, as they were cutting close to the road, a man came walking past without even looking at them and Hambleton saw him plainly. A tall, thin man with a bent nose, a very small and oddly wide jawbones: Louis Magid, the killer.

When they had finished work for that evening they went back to the cottage, boiled water and washed luxuriously in a bucket before the fire. They combed their respective hair, brushed each other's coats and went out together looking positively dignified. The vineyard where they had been was a little outside the town and they walked along the path which led to it. On their left, the lind rose shrubs and the hillside was terraced for vines, near the top of the ridge an ancient stone chateau looked down from among trees and a rutted lane curved up from the road through the vineyards and vanished behind the house.

"That is a nice place," said Hambleton. "The view from it must be charming."

"It is sadly neglected," said Dinel severely. "Those windows have not been cleaned this year and some of them are broken. But it is a nice place, as you say. Not too big."

"I suppose these vineyards around it belong to the house."

"No doubt. Now, they are very well kept whereas the house is shabby. I assume that they are let or sold." Near the gate and facing the road was an iron bearing the name of the Happy Traveller. Dinel stopped and looked at it.

"Why should we walk farther?"

An hour later, having dined, they were sitting at a table outside under the overhanging trees, leisurely finishing a bottle of wine. The Happy Traveller had a good deal more custom than one might expect, it seemed that people strolled out from the town to eat on the terrace or drink a glass of wine before strutting home again to bed, but Hambleton looked in vain for a face he could recognize.

Presently a man wandered out of the cafe with a bottle in one hand and a glass in the other. He was plainly not very steady on his feet and it was more than probable that he had been encouraged to sit outside. Parties sitting around tables looked over their shoulders and closed up together as he approached, since it was evident that he wanted company and not to sit alone. Eventually he arrived at Hambleton's table.

"Don't mind if I sit here, do you?" Room for a little one, eh?"

"For the short time we shall be here," said Dinel coolly.

"Thank you. Have a drink? Oh, you've got some; that's right. He put his glass down on the table and filled it from his bottle. "Not much left in here, is there? Never mind. Can always buy another, can't I? Plenty of money."

"How nice," said Hambleton.

"You won't? You have plenty of money, too?" "Yes, we have," said Dinel, taking a long pull at his simple glass. "I don't see you, so nothing to say for receiving, for once, money which he had honestly earned that he had to tell everyone about."

The man emptied his glass, refilled it and drank the contents. He then leaned forward across the table, breathing vigorously into their faces, and spoke confidentially.

"I get money from a doctor," he whispered. "He's dead, but he's still useful. Dr. Perier. You wouldn't know him. Lots of money."

"Excuse us," said Dinel, rising. "It is time we retired."

"It is, indeed, getting late," said Hambleton, also getting up, "and we are weary. We will wish you good-night, and you go to bed."

"You run along," said the man in an offended voice. "I'm not coming."

They walked away and left him.

A few nights later Hambleton and Dinel sat in their hut having supper, it was, as they were making coffee, a question of how to fill up some of the meat pale by which Burgundy so much improved.

Hambleton rose to his feet and shook himself.

"Let us go down to the Happy Traveller and have a little glass of something in the bar," he said. "We have enough money if we do not have too many and it will settle our stomachs for the night."

A quarter of an hour later they were in the bar of the chateau, a small room with a table and a bottle of cognac. There were several people in the bar and more sitting at the tables outside, but the place was by no means full and it was very quiet.

Presently the door opened and two men came in together. One was the man who had been so drunk there before and the man with him was Louis Magid. Hambleton turned away from them and Dinel gave him a look at the newcomer.

"That man again," he said. "I hope that he won't distract us tonight."

"Tonight he has a friend with him," said Hambleton evenly.

"And once again he has had a drink too many. If he speaks to us tonight I shall walk out."

"I will speak to him and distract him. He is no worse than many others who never drink a little too much, a bore indeed, but harmless."

"That may be, but he makes my spine creep."

Hambleton thought that if the sight of Magid made one's spine creep it would be less surprising but did not say so. Dinel finished his cognac and pushed the glass away.

"I shall go back. I do not care for it here with that man in the room. Do not hurry yourself for me."

"I may perhaps go for a short walk before I turn in. I will try not to disturb you."

Dinel nodded and went out. Hambleton finished his drink, paid his bill and went out in his turn but not back to the cottage. He was not sure to see where Magid went, with or without his temperate companion, and the layout of the Happy Traveller made it easy to watch the place. It stood close to the road with a terrace in front, there was a narrow drive around one side of the house to a car park at the back. The whole property was enclosed by the dry-stone wall of the vineyard

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running from the road round to the road again like a capital D laid upon its upright. There was no way out but by the entrance on the road though no doubt a man could climb that dry-stone wall if he had a mind for stumbling up a steep hill between the rows of vines.

Hambleton found himself a quiet nook from which he could watch front and back at once and settled down to wait.

Time passed, customers left and no more came, the car park emptied and the moon rose in the sky with her accustomed serenity, but there was no sign of Magid and his companion.

"Odd," said Hambleton, "very odd. Magid and associate are here, staying at the same place, there are rooms to let, so why didn't I see them answer light go on? It doesn't matter, I only wanted to know where Magid stays in Beaune and it would seem that I have found it."

He slipped out of his retreat and went back to the cottage where Dinel should have been sound asleep before out through the window, light showing in the window. Dinel must have dropped asleep with the candle alight. Hambleton opened the door without noise and stepped into the room. Dinel was sitting by the fire thoughtfully plucking a chicken.

"Hello," said Hambleton.

Dinel started so violently that he all but dropped the chicken into the fire and the gap he gave was almost a yelp.

"Dieu! How you frightened me! I didn't hear a sound."

"I thought you might be asleep. Why, what's the matter?" Dinel had struggled to his feet, taken the fire, resting a little of wine from its place of confinement and was drinking from it in long gulps.

"Aren't you well?"

"I've seen something horrible. You know that man who was so drunk? Yes, well, he's dead!"

"Dead?" said Hambleton.

"Shot dead. I saw it. Well, not quite. I heard it, and then that man who was with him carried out the body slung over his shoulder like a sack of coal."

"Sit down again by the fire, Dinel. You are shivering. Now tell me all about it, when and where did all this happen?"

"I sat at that chateau above the vineyards. Why are you looking at me like that? When I left you I went up the road a little and then turned up the hillside between the rows of vines. I wanted a chicken. Their henhouse is in the stable yard at the side of the house but there's nothing there now except these hens and a pig or two in a sty. The hens never stirred a feather, so I squatted down on the grass and waited. I lay there with my big legs very lightly, feeling for the one with the smoothest legs. The youngest, you know. This is the one. I picked her out, took her off the perch and wrung her neck and not one of the others so much as cheered. Good?"

"Very good indeed. I couldn't do that."

"I will show you how some men do it. Then I stood her away in my inside coat pocket, opened the henhouse door again and stuck my head out. Almost I fell down flat, for all the ground-floor windows looking on the yard were lit up and there were people moving about, I could see their shadows, only 10 metres away, more than that?"

"Did you—?"

"Before I could do anything at all there was a shot fired inside the house, so I took my head back again among the hens. I kept the door open a slit and peered out, and just at that moment someone opened the house door wide. There there was no doubt a man could climb that dry-stone wall if he had a mind for stumbling up a steep hill between the rows of vines. There was a thump and he went back to the house without the body. I heard him call to someone, 'Where the hell is the key?' I saw him enter the house and Tictoc, I could not stay there any longer, I slipped out of the henhouse and ran for it. Only,

Hambleton threw some more wood on the fire and the flames made a warm and cheerful light.

"I began to hear voices. I heard the man with a hired hand hit the lid. That man went to the wall and tried to lift the lid but it would not lift and I heard a padlock rattle. That man swore, I heard him call to someone, 'Where the hell is the key?' I saw him enter the house and Tictoc, I could not stay there any longer, I slipped out of the henhouse and ran for it. Only,

when I passed the corpse lying by the well I bent down and looked at its face. It was the man who was drunk."

Hambledon stared unseeing into the fire, for he was trying to puzzle out how those two men could have reached the chateau so quickly when he himself had the best of reasons for knowing that they had not left the Happy Traveller.

"We were passing the time on him," said Dinel, fidgeting, "that was what you thought of doing. How could I explain away what I was doing there? Besides, the man he killed was no loss."

"The man to whom you took such a marked dislike. Why? Did you know anything about him?"

"Nothing, not even his name, but I knew quite a lot about some men used to know. He mentioned a name that night when he talked to us. If you remember, 'A Dr. Petiot.'

"Petiot. It does ring a faint bell—who was he?"

"It is easily seen that you were not in Paris during the war," Monsieur le Docteur de Petiot said in a smoky room in the Rue Caumartin, a narrow back street in the Avenue Foch and the Rue Lescouer. You will understand that during the German occupation there were many people who thought it advisable to leave France with all the valuables they could carry with them. Petiot undertook to help them to get away. In a sense, of course, he did. He killed them, it is thought, in two incendiaries and dropped the remains into a pit of quicklime; all this in his nursing home in the Avenue Foch. Once again I hear the name Petiot. I do not like the dark."

"But," said Hambledon.

"No buts about it. It was clever, you know. Petiot always figured on getting these people moved along to his home naturally; then these people came to his home with suitcases containing all they had of money, jewelry, valuables, to take with them, of course. When they disappeared and no more was heard from them, that was natural. Of course, they would not write, it wouldn't safe."

I remember now. He made a dramatic escape, did he not, he did not."

"There were complaints about black smoke, the neighbors rang up the police—the fire brigade—they all came and broke in since there was no one in the house. Figure to yourself what they found. One of them rang up the surgery in the Rue Caumartin and asked Petiot to come back to his surgery home. He came, I think, on a bicycle, to the old gendarme's number, the house of whom he asks what is all the trouble and the gendarme says it is 27 corpses, that is the trouble, so Dr. Petiot rides away again on his bicycle and nobody sees him any more for eight months. Suddenly, in November of that year, 1944, someone who knew Petiot saw him at a Metro station in Paris and he was arrested."

"Stay in Paris?" said Hambledon. "or perhaps again in Paris?" He must have been mad, hundreds of people know every doctor."

"He was in uniform, calling himself Captain something," Capt. Valery of the Magquis, did not appear anxious; he said that he had killed 63 people, not 27, and that they were all members of the Gestapo or traitors, who betrayed Frenchmen to the Gestapo. Since some of his victims were elderly Jews and some were children, he was not believed."

"I take it that he was convicted?"

"Oh, yes," said Dinel casually, "and destroyed like the monster he was, but that was not much use, was it? It did not bring these poor people back. To turn to another aspect. Petiot could not, of course, have done all this singlehanded. He must have had help. I wonder where they are all dead, too. I doubt it, don't you?"

"That man who died tonight?"

"Not quite. He said he knew Petiot, did he not, and that though he was dead, he was still useful as a source of money. You think blackmail, Tico?" I say blackmail also. That drunkard may not himself have associated with Petiot but he knows someone who does. I know. I could say, since he also is dead, that he turned down compensation at the bottom of that well. But whom did he know? Your old friend Magad?"

"Nineteen forty-four at latest for Petiot," said Hambledon thoughtfully. "Fourteen years ago now. Magad is not much over 30, and he is a Marseillot, so I doubt his having been in Paris helping Petiot at the age of 16. Not that he is morally incapable—"

"Then he was helping someone else tonight, someone who knew Petiot."

On the following evening Dinel said that he was going to apply himself to cooking the chicken, a matter which required the utmost concentration. Hambledon, who had an errand upon which he definitely did not want Dinel's company, said that he would go to the chateau to have a look.

There were several people in the police station of Beaune that evening upon various errands; both they and the sergeant-in-charge looked around in surprise when a grubby figure in shabby clothes walked into the room and waited patiently for attention.

Eventually the sergeant called him up.

"You there! What do you want?" Hambledon came to the desk and said politely that he had called in to report that he had lost a wallet. The sergeant's eyebrows went up, but even the most unlikely people can do own wallets.

"Full particulars, please," he said, and drew a form out of his pocket. He leaned on the desk and took out a card which the chief of police at Dijon had given to him.

"It's all there," he said.

The sergeant picked it up and his eyebrows went up a good deal farther than before. He looked at it carefully upon both sides and then rose suddenly to his feet.

"I'll be back," he said, and walked through a door behind him which he closed firmly after himself. A few minutes later he returned, opened the flap of the desk which separated him from his customers, and came through to lay an official hand on Hambledon's shoulder.

"You come with me."

Hambledon went meekly, followed by sympathetic glances from the other clients.

When he was shown into the office, the chief of police rose from behind the desk to greet him.

"This is an honor, Monsieur Hambledon. We have been expecting you ever since my friend the chief of police at Dijon telephoned to tell me about you. You have been here this afternoon, he when he asked about you we had to say that we had not seen anything of you. He was not even certain that you were still here."

"Yes," said Hambledon, "thank you. I am still here, as you see, probably to your horror."

"I am ready to help you in every possible way." "I am in one or two ways at the moment and that is a point of great importance. The chateau on the hillside above the inn called the Happy Traveller—"

"The Chateau des Colonnes, monsieur?"

"I believe that is its name, yes. There are vineyards between the house and the road."

"I am told that the house is owned by the family Tabour who own the chateau but now they are leased to a wine-grower who owns other vineyards in this district. Mademoiselle Tabour could not be expected to manage these herself."

"Would you tell me monsieur," said Hambledon, "all that you know about that house? Who lives there, is it let to tenants, have they lived there long?"

The chief of police looked a little abashed.

"The family Tabour," he said, "have lived at the Chateau des Colonnes for several generations, they have always been respected. Mademoiselle's parents died in Paris during the war and her brother Lucien disappeared, as too often happened. I understand that he was a little simple, not much more than a boy by any means, but he was a good boy, a simple boy. The Tabour family went to Paris to live so that he could have the best education suited to his needs." At that time and for some years the chateau was left alone, as I said, she came back from Paris to live here. She lives very retired with one maid. She is in her sixties now, I am about the place. Mademoiselle is not rich, you understand, very young now. She has had a sad life."

"You are absolutely certain of all this, Monsieur le Chef?"

"But, certain, monsieur. Not of my personal knowledge, but the family are well known locally." Hambledon had to bend to the hut to find it full of the savory smell of roasting chicken, but for the moment he disregarded this.

"I've been thinking, Dinel," he said. "That corpse down the well—"

Dinel became suddenly so angry that his teeth chattered.

"It is that you must introduce a subject like

that when I am about to serve up this exquisite bird! Have you no decorum, no pulse, no discretion, no self?"

Hambledon apologized. "I only thought that if the people at the chateau use that well—"

"They do not. They have main water laid on. They have not used that well for 20 years."

On the following day the group of which Hambledon and Dinel had been a part had transferred to another vineyard, that upon the opposite side of the road to the Happy Traveller. They had only to lift their eyes to see, on a shelf of the hillside above it, the Chateau des Colonnes with its dusty private road curving up through the vineyards. A little before midday the workers gathered together for the midday meal; food which they had themselves brought, and wine provided by the management.

They were sitting quite near the road making remarks about the passersby and exchanging local gossip so which Hambledon and Dinel, being strangers in an unfamiliar place and heard many strange things. Presently a woman in a dark dress of no particular fashion came walking on the road from the town, followed by a man carrying two suitcases. She was a tall, gaiky woman with a long, narrow face and a beaky nose; she was long-legged and walked with a swinging stride which plainly embarrassed the short, fat man with the big nose. They were soon joined by another leading up to the chateau and striding up the hill with no change of pace while her laden porter lagged yet farther behind.

"Mademoiselle returns home again," said the woman next to Hambledon.

"Mademoiselle?"

"Mademoiselle Tabour from the chateau up there."

Dinel, who had been staring at her, uttered a sort of grunt, took a long pull at the wine and lay down flat with his arms across his face.

"She has been away these two days," said a young girl with her hair tied in a pony-tail. It is Friday, I think, but yesterday morning going off with two suitcases to catch the bus."

"Why do women waste so much for two days? She is not the gay type, mademoiselle."

"Who knows what a lady like will want?"

"Always she does this when she goes away. For a night or two, for a week or more, always the two suitcases."

"What is her business, is it not?"

When the argument came finally to an end and it was time to work again, Dinel was slow to stir and Hambledon thought that under the grime and the sunburn his face was a rather odd color.

"Are you not feeling well?"

"I am all right, monsieur," Dinel grunted up rather more firmly than usual. "I am perfectly well. A little sleepy for the moment, that is all."

That night in the hut Hambledon stretched and yawned and said that he did not think that he would go to work next morning.

"Why not?" asked Dinel.

"For several reasons. I say, Dinel?"

"Well?"

Mademoiselle Tabour went away on Wednesday morning for two days; she was not at the chateau the night before last."

"No," said Dinel, "that is indisputable. Mademoiselle Tabour was not there."

"But there was someone else there besides Magad, was there not? You heard someone speak—"

"No," I heard nothing, but I am not sure exactly what the person said. I would not ask the cat if kept the keys. But I did not hear anyone answer. Should we now lie down and sleep? It is getting late."

Hambledon agreed. If Dinel did not wish to talk about the Chateau des Colonnes there was no point in putting him to it. Dinel was not a man, looking back on the chicken-stealing episode, Dinel was more scared now than he had been at the time.

The next morning, therefore, they parted as arranged, Dinel to work and Hambledon to Dijon.

Though the journey to Dijon from Beaune takes only a little over half hour, Hambledon would appear to have been suffering from the effects of a hangover, because from the time once Dinel had left he had not slept.

He went into a cafe for a quarter-liter of wine, which is a very modest amount indeed, but seemed to have affected him more than one would expect, for when he came out he was definitely unsteady.

A policeman noticed Hambledon with interest,

since it was early in the day for a man to be as unsteady at that.

"Here you," said the policeman, "you'd best, go home and sleep it off."

"How dare you," said the tramp indignantly, and pushed the policeman in the chest, after which the former was led away by the latter to the *Préfecture de Police*. The moment they were inside the building:

"Thank you so much," said Hambleton in his normal crisp tones. "Very kindly done."

"It is inadmissible," said the constable coldly. "It is impertinent to the police. Come with me."

He led his captive by the arms into the office of the station sergeant who, formerly, had met Hambleton when he was there before and even recognized him when he saw him again.

"Ah, monsieur! Good morning. Monsieur wishes to see Monsieur the Chief!"

"It is possible," said Hambleton.

"I will inquire at once. You," to the constable, "return to your duties. You know this gentleman is here again."

"Without doubt," said the constable faintly.

The chief of police was friendly, welcoming and perfectly polite, but there was amusement moving warily below the surface.

"If you want to laugh heartily at the sight of me," said Hambleton, "pray do so. I shall only be flattered if you do. You know, you know."

"But, monsieur, it is magnifique!"

"Thank you. Redolent of the soil, too, I know."

"I hope your inquiries have prospered?"

"I should not presume to use the word 'prosperous.' They are not entirely abstinent: that is all, at least I think not but that is the mark of it. What I mean is that it is so entirely owing to me to allow me to speak to Monsieur Letord of the *Sûreté*? If the call comes from here he can satisfy himself that it is genuine."

"I will put a message through asking him to ring back to this number," said the chief, and did so. "Now, while we are waiting for the call, is there any news you can give me? I can serve you."

"I want to go to Paris today, monsieur. Is there any other means besides the railway? For I fear that if I were to present myself as one wishing to travel by train I might find myself unwelcome."

"It is possible," admitted the chief. "There are, in fact, certain means available. I can't tell you. Of course, I am safe and I don't want to find myself being dragged off and washed. I have taken a good deal of trouble to acquire this—this pains and I don't want to—"

He was interrupted by the telephone.

"Your call," said the chief, and passed the instrument across to Hambleton. "Excuse me a moment. I want to see one of my men." He went out of the room and Hambleton addressed himself to the telephone.

"That you, Letord?" Hambleton heard. Would you do something for me. Very good of you. Would you ring up Forgan and Campbell in London for me," he gave the telephone number of the *Clarkebridge Road* and "and then come to drop everything and come to Paris on the first available train? They must get there tonight, that's important. When they arrive in Paris they must find a hotel first and then ring your office to say where they are staying. I'm coming up today, Letord. Then I'll ring your office to find where Campbell and Forgan are, and then ring them and give them the necessary details. Yes, it's all quite simple when you come to work it out. Thank you very much. Au revoir."

The chief of police remained, saying that he had just had an idea which had, to his surprise, turned out to be a good one. "One of my men has a brother who drives one of the greatest lorries I thought there was something about his going to Paris today, with a load of barrels of wine. He goes this afternoon if it would suit you to drive with him. It will be a long, slow run but at least the man is honest and reliable."

Hambleton thought it an excellent idea and said so.

It was a little after midnight when Hambleton came to Paris but not too late to ring up the *Sûreté* which knows no closing hour. Monsieur Letord had gone home, yes, but there was a message for Monsieur Hambleton. "His friends are staying at the Hotel Anglo-Américaine."

Forgan and Campbell, having newly arrived in Paris, were too quickly to be had before midnight.

"Alexander Forgan speaking. Who calls?" "Hambleton here."

"Well, so I guessed, but wasn't sure whether it would be tactful to mention names. How nice of you to encourage us to come to Paris. How are you?"

"Listen, Forgan. I can't tell you much now, but could you and Campbell meet me in the Flea-Market at 11 tomorrow morning? Good. Do you know the place at all?"

"Never been there but we have heard of it as who has not?"

"Who indeed. Right in the middle of it there's a stall where they sell statuary. There may be more than one, but this particular is a must. I'm having your attention given as for a look at his big and broken pieces of Roman work, most conspicuously a large figure weighing the best part of a ton but without a head. When this you see, look round for me."

William Forgan and Alexander Campbell were engineers who had spent some years keeping the wheels of industry turning in the Americas and had come from their employment when they came back to London and together opened a small shop in the Clerkenwell Road where they sell models of locomotives, yachts, speedboats, aeroplanes, traction engines and practically every form of transport which moves on land, sea, and in the air. Forgan and Campbell were old friends of Hambleton's and had helped him upon several occasions in the past, though their unorthodox methods had failed to endear them to *Le Lord*.

CHAPTER VII

THE famous Flea-Market of Paris started many years ago in a field selling old clothes—hence its name—on a piece of waste land. It has developed into a large market for second-hand goods of all descriptions including pictures, miniatures, furniture and antiques of all kinds, some of them both valuable and costly.

Forgan and Campbell passed through the market where all new goods of the shoddy kind had been turned into a collection of odds and ends which really does beggar description. They found several stalls which sold statuary, if that is the correct inclusive term for wooden figures of saints with halved bodies, reclining forms of elegant young women in alabaster and gilt, banners of heroes and angels, small boxes selling gilt newspapers, shiny shoddyships who had lost their arms, but on the large figure of a possibly Roman personage without his head there was no sign.

"Can it be that we have overlooked it?" asked Forgan.

They turned back and thereby came face to face, with a slightly demeaning figure in a ragged coat, shabby trousers and a pair of torn, holey boots, who was moaning round the stalls, muttering to himself. He stepped in front of Forgan and asked in a quavering voice in French for the price of a meal. Forgan sidestepped him but the old man still followed, muttering that he was hungry, and Campbell got his hand in his pocket for a 20-franc piece. Not enough, not enough, complained the scrounger. "They charge 6,000 francs at the *Tour d'Argent*."

"There are other establishments," said Campbell reasonably.

"Oh, come on, Campbell," said Forgan in English. "Don't encourage the old hoarse or hell hang round us for ever, and when we do meet Hambleton—"

"You have," said the old hoarse in English better than thines. "Don't stand there gaping. Stroll on. I follow."

"The old maestro in person," mourned Campbell, and they strolled on, stopping frequently to admire the treasures laid out before them while Hambleton wandered vaguely, sometimes behind him and sometimes in front, muttering all the time. "It is the *d'Alouy Circus*, he said. "I told you something about it. I told you it was the *d'Alouy*. That's a perfectly horrible restaurant just outside here but at least they won't mind my going in, so if you'll follow me there—"

Hambleton drifted away.

The restaurant was quite repellent and kept by a cross-eyed man of singular aspect, but Hambleton entered without hesitation with Forgan and Campbell at his heels. He left the two into a small room at the back and the proprietor came in with a

bottle of wine for which Campbell paid. Hambleton nodded to the cross-eyed man who nodded back and went out, shutting the door after him.

"Well now," said Hambleton. "In the first place, thank you for coming. I'm very glad to see you."

"We are very happy to be here," said Campbell politely. He looked around the dingy room which seemed of little account to him and added: "I mean, in Paris and in your company."

"I've come up from Beause," said Hambleton, "and I'm going back there. I have got a job in a vineyard, picking grapes. It is the season of the wine harvest."

"Mphile," said Forgan.

"When I first came to Paris I was able to observe some of the *d'Alouy Circus*. A man named Jean Artaud, another named Michel—surname unknown—and Louis Magid, who was in London for a short time. I have seen Artaud once at Dijon and Magid twice at Beause. There is a house at Beause called the *Château des Colonnes*; a few nights ago Magid told me that that chateau and dropped the body down the well."

"Most unhygienic," said Campbell severely.

"The well is not now used," said Hambleton. "There is a cover, which is kept locked, over the well. Magid had to go back to the house for the key."

"The people who live there know that there is a body in the well, but they normally live there."

"Somebody who was in the house that night knew it, certainly, but whether he or she normally lives there is another thing. The place belongs to a middle-aged Miss Tabot but she was away from home at the time and may know nothing about it. I mean it possible. She lives there alone with a woman nurse and a man who works in the gardens and does odd jobs."

"Why was the man in the well, do you know?" asked Forgan.

"No. There are a lot of things I don't know and that is why I sent you. I want you to go to the *Château des Colonnes* and check up whether covering over like you like, and see if you can pick up anything. I am a bit hampered single-handed. Now I expect that we go along to Letord at the *Quai des Gréveires* and see if he can tell us anything more."

When they came to the offices of the police judicature, the placelotches detective branch—they called Letord *Le Lord*—waiting for them in the courtyard inside the archway.

"Sombrie here, isn't it?" said Campbell in an awestruck whisper. "Menacing," said Forgan.

Hambleton told Letord all what he had already told the other two men, but in considerably more detail. He expected Letord to react strongly to the story of the corpse in the well, but the Frenchman seemed to take little interest in who had committed the crime.

"You saw him close-up, of course. You talked to him or to you, yes? Can you describe him?"

Hambleton did so, after the police manner, which is practically a verbal photograph. "He was a thundering bore," he added. "But as I rather gathered that he was engaged in blackmail I did look at him carefully."

Letord was the first to whom the description sounded to him a little like *Papa Fagin*, who had a nice piece of work if ever there was one, "and he had a nick out of his right ear as you describe. I sat beside the dock for five days when he was tried and I remember it very clearly. I will ring down for some cards and we will see." He lit the desk telephone and instructed Records.

While they were awaiting the result, Letord turned to Forgan and Campbell.

"It was one of you to whom I had the pleasure of telephoning yesterday on behalf of Monsieur Hambleton here, was it not?"

"It was I to whom you spoke," said Forgan with a little bow.

"Did I understand from Monsieur Hambleton," said Letord, "that you are accompanying him to *Le Lord*?"

"Not accompanying," said Hambleton. "Following after. You will need a car; you had better hire one here in Paris."

"No need at all," said Forgan. "We have one."

Hambleton looked blank, and Campbell said: "The *Role*, you know. You cannot have forgotten our *Role*."

"A car of the most magnificent," said Letord politely.

"Especially this one. But we shall want a driver."

We had to leave Arthur at home this time to mind the business."

"Brussels," said Forgan, "we did not know that we should need him, did we? The business does."

"I expect you can hire another," began Hambleton, when the door opened and a man came in with half a dozen cards having photographs stuck on them in face and profile. Hambleton looked them over, picked one out and said: "That's him. No question about it."

Letord looked at it and said: "I was right, that is Pepi l'Agneau, so called. So he is dead, is he? Good. We can now cross him off our files."

Forgan raised his eyebrows and his shoulders,

and said that that was very nice.

"I was really afraid that you would consider it your duty to inform the police

that Beaune a murder had been committed and—"

"Certainly not," said Letord. "I have no shadow of authority over the Beaune police, as you know perfectly well. Hambleton, if you stop to think Who and why the mastermakers of the plot in police force, by telling them about crimes that don't know they have had? It is not as though you have informed me officially, is it? Do you want it investigated at once?"

"No," said Hambleton. "On the contrary. This case we are on is much more important than the murder of a blackmailer by crooks. No, I am not much interested in telling them all that you know about the Tabarot family of the Chateau des Colonnes."

"You warned me this morning that you were going to ask this," said Letord. "I had them looked up. They had lived in Paris for some years before the war. In 1940 Monsieur and Madame Tabarot came to the police to report that their son Lucien had disappeared. Age, 24, height 1.75 metres, eyes blue, hair brown and so on. He was said to be a little substandard mentally. There is a note here that no action was taken because Lucien Tabarot was said to have joined the Resistance." Letord laid down his papers with a laugh. "I should have known there were some in the police force. Some of them thought that quite a lot of the Resistance people were not too bright, but they did not enrol simpletons if they knew it. The records may well be mistaken there. The Paris police were working under difficulties. However, Lucien Tabarot disappeared, finally, it seems."

Plenty of people disappeared here at that time," said Hambleton quietly.

"You are right. The next reference to the Tabarots is in 1943. The daughter, Marie-Josephine Tabarot, came to the police and complained that her father and mother were missing. It seems that they had been interrogated by the Gestapo and that had frightened them so much that they had left home again. They had the name of a man named Perrin, Marthe Perrin. Three months later, they had disappeared once more and it was assumed that the Gestapo had got them again. They were elderly and in poor health."

"So Mlle. Marthe Perrin was looked up too, but she also was not to be found. The daughter said that the Perrins had housed the Tabarots out of kindness, and that was, of course, but it emerged that she was not a woman simple enough to be in her Quarier though the police had nothing against her. She was, in fact, accused later on of having been one of Dr. Periot's lady birds but since she had vanished like so many others—"

Letord stopped suddenly and looked at Hambleton.

"Now that is an idea. The Periot case—"

He snatched up his telephone and told someone at the other end to send him up the papers on the Periot case.

Forgan and Campbell appealed to Hambleton who gave them a brief and vivid sketch of the doctor's activities.

"Now Bluebeard is nowhere in sight," said Letord.

"An interesting case," said Hambleton. "My travelling companion, Victor Dinet, was talking about it the other night. Your old friend new dead, Pepi l'Agneau, mentioned the name of Dr. Periot as being helpful in obtaining money from people if one ran short."

"Oh, oh, did he? That was the point at which you decided that he was engaged in blackmail, hem? I should say that you are perfectly right. Now, where are we? The old Monsieur and Madame Tabarot went to lodge with a woman later said to be an associate of Periot. They disappeared. Now, 15 or more years later, a man once involved in that case

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mentions that name at the gates of the Tabarot's house of Les Colonnes. Eh? Where the devil is that Periot dossier? I think they all go to sleep in that place—"

But the door opened again and a clerk came in with a stout file of papers which he laid on Letord's desk.

"Thank you," said Letord, seizing upon it. "Now run away. Now, here we are. Tabarot, Henri Jean, Tabarot, Amelie Julie, Tabarot, Marie-Josephine. That last, that must be a mistake, for Marie-Josephine is the daughter who had complained to the police some months earlier that her parents were missing. She was, however, our interpretation failed, that since she did not wish to live alone in Paris, she was re-opening the family place at Beaune which had been unoccupied for some years.

"She is still there," said Hambleton.

"I suppose," said Hambleton slowly, "that she does not know that her parents were murdered by Periot."

The police did not, I think, put these inquiries together to make those two ends meet," said Letord. Campbell shifted his feet and the others looked at him.

"The simple brother," he said. "Did he ever turn up again? Was he ever proved dead or anything definite like that?"

Letord shook his head.

"Let me do as I know. The Beaune police might know."

"Thank you," said Campbell. "Very sad, all this."

"I think," said Letord, looking at Campbell and Forgan, "that it would be as well if I found a driver for you. We could then be sure that he is an honest and reliable man who could be trusted to keep mouth shut and not talk about your affairs. Eh? I know most of the rogues in Paris but I do know a few honest men also."

"I am most grateful," said Forgan. "We both are. If it is not giving you too much trouble we should be so glad if you would do that."

Hambleton left the Odile's and drove over the Pont St. Michel to the left bank, a part of Paris where no one is ever surprised at anything, and took them to a cafe.

"Here we can eat together," he said. "If anyone thinks that we are an oddly associated trio they will say that I am an eccentric or that you two are slumming. I have had an idea. Let us order food, for I am starving."

The idea, said Hambleton in the intervals of mastication, was this: "But you must tell me if you don't like it. Do you remember some years ago, when we were all Amis-jeux-Lire together, you, Campbell, were a neurotic patient recovering from a nervous breakdown which you had had?"

A slow smile spread across Campbell's face.

"And a good time was had by all, as they say."

"And on this occasion?" asked Forgan. "Or do I already divine your everlasting whimsies?"

"Probably. This missing brother—"

"I am not a simpleton, you know, and gently."

"Yes, but you won't say 'so,' said Hambleton.

"I assume that Mlle. Tabarot would know you were not her brother at sight even if she hasn't seen him since 1943. You will, therefore, keep out of her way which should be possible as she seldom leaves the chateau. You, I thought, might go and stay at the Hotel de la Poste. It's a nice place, and sign as Lucien Tabarot. I'll ask Letord to get you some papers. You won't claim to be the missing brother?"

"Since my earliest youth," said Campbell warmly, "I have longed with every fibre of my being to be a missing heir."

"You will only drift about the town looking innocent and charming and let people assume that it is a child or an old woman you are, I mean."

"Hambleton, do you know any decent, reputable psychologist in Paris?" asked Campbell.

"No," said Hambleton. "What fear?"

"I should like a certificate to prove I'm sane. Not many sane people can do that, can they? Must usurp Hambleton, if that is what you are to ask Letord to do. The name of Lucien Tabarot would be more probably forthcoming than if I ask for them, am I right?"

"I'll ask him tonight," said Hambleton. "By the way, it will be quite natural for you to avoid your sister. I've just remembered what I was told in a Beaune pub one night. You can't stand your sister at any price. She's four years older than you and she used to boss you about something horrid.

She tried to strangle you once."

"And who am I in this story?" asked Forgan. "My friend, my boon companion?" said Campbell. "With a faint but perceptible hint of medical attendant. We have, as Hambleton points out, rehearsed this act."

"I'll try to pick up some stories of your early youth," said Hambleton. "You might, for example, have had a passion for spinach."

"Then I've grown out of it."

Hambleton slept most of the way from Paris to Dijon, had breakfast there and took the first bus back to Beaune. Nothing particular seemed to have happened during the absence which had, indeed, occupied 48 hours though it had been hurried journeys. Dinet was still seemed longer. Dinet was still living contentedly in the hut and was his usual placid self, though Hambleton noticed that he seemed quieter than before, as though there were something on him mind, though if there were, he did not speak of it.

A few days passed without incident and then, quite suddenly, the vineyard was back full of gossip which became most vocal in the break for lunch. "It cannot be he. What? After all these years?"

"It is he, it must be. My sister's eldest girl, at the Hotel de la Poste, saw the name in the book. The porter showed it to her. They are all talking about it."

"Terrible. He died during the war, the Germans killed him."

"Who saw him dead? People come back."

"They do not wait 17 years—"

"Why not? The world is a large place. I have seen him myself and it is the same. He moons about looking pleasantly at people and taking old Dijon's produce from the shop just as he did as a child."

"He will get into trouble, then—"

"Not at all. That dark man, his friend, he pays for everything."

"It must be the same! The same height, the same mannerisms, of course, naturally, the same name. It is not so common, that name."

Hambleton thought it time he took an intelligent interest.

"Some wanderer who has returned, madame?"

"But yes, the brother of mademoiselle up at the chateau there, the young Tabarot, Lucien Tabarot." Dinet, who was suddenly less paying much attention, suddenly left off chomping his meal and had sworn that a whole range of expressions were following each other across what was visible of his face behind a hedge of dusty hair; surprise, incredulity and puzzlement, but principally puzzlement.

"He does not say that he is his brother. They say that when the chemist asked him that, he would not answer."

A slightly laughered and walked away—"

"There is money there. There is a car of the most magnificent—"

"But us old as one's grandmother," said the girl with the pony-tail hair. "Jules at the garage says it is 40 years old but their driver says it goes very well. He is proud of it."

"He should be proud to see his sister, they say."

"I should be too. I remember my parents used to fight when they were children. I have parted them myself. I used to work there before I married," said one of the older women. "That was before they went away to Paris, in the old Madame's time. She was not so old then, herself. The poor little girl, that Marie-Josephine had a wicked temper. I saw her take a kick at him."

"Do you see anything of her now?"

"Her? Oh, no, she never speaks to anyone. Well, it may be she does not remember, she was but a child when they left and the little Lucien four years younger. It's all a long time ago."

Hambleton referred to this story when he and Dinet were back in the hut that night.

"Odd, isn't it? Fancy coming back after 17 years!"

"People do," said Dinet.

"Oh, yes, but it is unusual. I wonder what his sister will say—"

"She will be really his brother."

"It will be interesting to see what happens next."

"Most interesting."

The chauffeur whom Letord had recommended to drive the Rolls was a small and neat young man named Martin. When he first saw the Rolls he

was nearly maddening, but by the time he had driven it 100 miles or so he became reconciled to it; by the time they reached Brusson he was bragging about it. He was very intelligent and extremely helpful.

As soon as tongues began to wag about Mousieur Forgan at the Hotel de la Poste it was both easy and natural for Martin to make inquiries about his employer.

"I have only known him for a little over a week," he would explain. "I was engaged in Paris by the other gentleman, the dark one, to drive the Rolls wherever they wished to go. I did not realize that the poor Monsieur Tabarot was a little—well, I know—er—all right, is he? You have known him long?"

He was rewarded by stories of the childhood of Lucien Tabarot. His passion for peaches from Dupont's, but, of course, it was Dupont *pure* in those days. He was now dead, naturally. Lucien would take the peaches and Dupont would send the bill to the Gare de l'Est. The postman, just as the present Dupont sent it to the Hotel de la Poste where M. Fouche had paid it. There was a statue of a small boy at the corner of a house, a fit-fused little Cupid with a broken nose. Lucien, aged six, used to stand and stare at it; Lucien, aged 40-something, passed to look at it whenever he passed. There was a tiny low archway, filled with an iron grating, low enough so that when the water ran over it the gurgling could be heard water running in the dark. It used to frighten the small boy, the man made a circuit to avoid it, and so on.

"Simple," said Campbell to Forgan. "Martin brings home the stories and I re-enact them as needed." *Simple.*

M. Tabarot became quite well known in a matter of days. He did not talk much but he smiled and nodded and was friendly.

One morning he was strolling by himself in the town when he realized he was being followed.

"I planned back," he said, calling Hambleton and Forgan about him later. "I saw it in my friend's eyes when I followed him. He was so good-looking, so young, so full of life. I followed him and waited for him. He came up, looking a bit, and said it was a lovely view, wasn't it? I agreed. We got on so well that we talked for quite a time about this and that till he said it was too hot to walk on and what about a nice drive into the country. He said he saw a car parked just off the road. I said this is a quiet road, but he was so wise in all this affair that *mes yeux* and I wanted to know what it was. I asked him if he had a watch and when he pulled it out I wanted to look at it, so he kindly took it off the chain and handed it to me. Well, men don't hand over perfectly good watches to total strangers of impaired intellect. I was a little nervous, so I took it and put it in my pocket instead. He sighed a bit but didn't protest and a few minutes later he again suggested a nice drive. This time I agreed and we started off together."

"Rather rash, possibly?" said Hambleton.

"Not really. You see, I was ready for him whereas he wasn't ready for me. I thought his face was suggestively dim, so I took it and put it in my pocket instead. We were going into the car and I saw him in profile and then I remembered. He was the subject of one of those pretty pictures Letord showed us the other day. Full face and profile. Suspected members of the *d'Arsay Circus*."

"Do you remember the name?"

"Heaven, no. I don't remember me for it. *Brutes* the *Brutes* man?" Letord doesn't matter now. We drove along and he talked about the country and the vineyards and how wine was made till he said what about trying some of the product and I said I hadn't got any money, at which he laughed lightly and pulled up at a roadside restaurant. The place was very friendly. I'll swear to it. We went inside and sat down at a table and he ordered a hash-brown of something or other, nothing special, and he poured it out himself. Well, that's how I know the place was innocent because he was more careful about concealing his little act from the proprietor than from me. I know the quickness, the bold and decisive, it's true, but he was quick enough. I saw him put something in a wine glass. He pushed it across to me, sat down beside me and took up his own, all very polite and formal.

"You can have your watch back," I said, and put it well away from the table. "It ticks and I don't like it. I want mine back."

He was quite pleased about that. He picked it up quickly before I could throw it across the room as I showed signs of being about to do, and then hauled out mine and gave it back. I made a fuss by that time the glasses had been swapped over, of course while he hooked his back on as chain and naturally.

"Naturally," said Forgan.

"Anyhow, he drank mine and I drank his, but his scope must have been fairly powerful because he didn't have a second glass. I thought I'd better wait a bit and let the heavy eyelids droop, so he said we'd better drive on a bit. He threw down a note for the wine and the rather sooty back to the car. That's when I made my move. I had him delayed so that he went by-ways. We drove for a couple of hundred yards with the most impeccable dignity till quite suddenly he fell over the wheel, ditched the car and slept like one dead. He wasn't though, he was snoring. That's when I got this bump on the head."

I didn't know how to go through his pockets. Hambleton.

I didn't know what I thought was a better idea. I went back to that cafe and rang up Beaune police station to tell them that there was a wrecked car in a ditch at such-and-such a spot and that the driver was snoring his head off. I then bought one of those little flasks of cognac and took it back to the car. By the time he'd had most of it sprinkled down his front he was wide awake again. I don't know, there could be no doubt about who ailed him.

"Congratulations," Campbell said, smiling.

"Very nicely done indeed. I shall now telephone the chief of police and tell him that he's got somebody from the *d'Arsay lot*."

Forgan and Campbell spent most of their time waiting for the police, sometimes, I suppose, or M. Fouche—was seldom far behind. The tradespeople soon learned this and allowed the poor M. Lucien Tabarot to take what he pleased in the knowledge that M. Fouche would always pay for it. M. Fouche asked so, among others, the grocer, while Campbell, out of a sense of justice, was always hamming it up, the pavement watching a small beetle trying to climb out of the gutter. He had just abridged a box of dates from the grocer's counter and was eating them. Forgan had come in to pay for them and was talking to the grocer, an elderly man with shining white hair.

"A poor monsieur," he murmured, watching Campbell through the window. "It is a tragedy, that. Is Campbell through the window, that seemed much longer than they really were.

"Do you suppose he's gone home?" said Forgan. "I should have thought that Martin would have reached the spot by this time, though what an unassuming fellow he is."

There were two sharp cracks so near together as to be almost simultaneous, and the sound of them was unmistakably different from the earlier shots.

"Perhaps he isn't an unarm'd chauffeur," said Campbell.

"That was a different gun."

They peered from behind their bush and then rose to their feet. The driver, Martin, the man in blue, was waiting at the edge of the wood looking down at the ground and in his hand there was a gun.

"Told you so," said Campbell. "Revolver or automatic?"

"Let's go and see."

Martin turned when he heard them coming.

"It is safe now," he said. "He is quite dead."

They stepped over the body, which lay on the ground at the foot of a tree because it was an American Garand rifle. The man had been hit twice, once in the shoulder and again in the head.

"You are a very good shot, Martin. Congratulations," said Forgan.

"I am a good shot," said Martin calmly, "but I did not shoot this man."

"You didn't?" Then who did?"

"I cannot say, monsieur. The shot came from farther back in the wood."

"You came to protect us," said Forgan a little blankly.

"Very good of you, monsieur. But ought you to complain about it? I mean, it was remarkably thoughtful of you, though, but I didn't know that French chauffeurs—"

"I have a permit for this gun, monsieur. Allow me to introduce myself. Det. Sgt. Robert Martin of the Surete. Monsieur Letord sent me. Permit me, my card."

Forgan looked at the warrant card and handed it to Campbell, who examined it and handed it back.

"Extremely splendid," he said. "I am a little deafened. I feel I should have recognized the official manner. Never mind. In the meantime, whence is this—this dead mortal integument?"

"I could not say, monsieur. Should we not ascertain?"

"I should."

They went along the Dijon road past the Chateau des Colonnes. Here they stopped the car. Forgan and Campbell got out and walked up the hillside, exercise in the fresh air is always beneficial. It was by no accident that they reached a spot from which they could look down upon the curling Dijon road, the old *Cordouan* vineyard, now bare, the Happy Families, their tones of cheery mirth in the background, the tones of pleasure. Below them the Rolls stood by the side of the road, even as they paused to look back, their chauffeur Martin got out of the car and sat down upon their running board to smoke a cigarette. On the farther side of the Dijon road there stood the dilapidated cottage where the old man had been found, Hambleton and Victor. It was a warm, quiet afternoon of autumn with the harvest all but done, and an air of deep peace lay upon the countryside.

Forgan chose a point of good visibility and sat down. Campbell roamed idly about picking flowers. Forgan took a pair of prismatic binoculars from his pocket.

"I shouldn't," said Campbell.

"Why not? There's nobody about."

At that moment there came from the wood behind the sound of a shot fired and the whistle of a bullet passing over their heads. "Down, Forgan, flat," he added, throwing himself down at the same moment.

"I'm not a shot," said Forgan, removing his face from the thicket upon which he had inadvertently placed it. "That was a rifle."

"Our driver's got the wind up," Campbell remarked in a low voice. "He's coming up that sunken track we walked up. Can't be run, too! He'll much better stop away."

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They waited some minutes, which seemed much longer than they really were.

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CHAPTER VIII

A DAY or two later Forgan and Campbell left the Hotel de la Poste in their dignified automobile, driven by their smart chauffeur. Forgan said that they were just going for a little drive in your so beautiful countryside. So soothing, you know."

They went along the Dijon road past the Chateau des Colonnes. Here they stopped the car. Forgan and Campbell got out and walked up the hillside, exercise in the fresh air is always beneficial. It was by no accident that they reached a spot from which they could look down upon the curling Dijon road, the old *Cordouan* vineyard, now bare, the Happy Families, their tones of cheery mirth in the background, the tones of pleasure. Below them the Rolls stood by the side of the road, even as they paused to look back, their chauffeur Martin got out of the car and sat down upon their running board to smoke a cigarette. On the farther side of the Dijon road there stood the dilapidated cottage where the old man had been found, Hambleton and Victor. It was a warm, quiet afternoon of autumn with the harvest all but done, and an air of deep peace lay upon the countryside.

servant at the chateau yester," said the detective, "but I can only see him at a distance. Doubtless his fingerprints will be on the gun, which I will take to the police station at Beaune in case this body should disappear as soon as our backs are turned upon it."

Martin picked up the rifle by the muzzle with his handkerchief and sheathed his charges back to the scabbard.

The Beaune police went out and collected the body from the edge of the wood; rather to Martin's surprise it was still there. When Hambleton had heard the story that evening he went to see the chief of police.

"No difficulty about identity," said the chief, "as far as I am concerned. That man was the well-known factotum at the chateau. He was quite well known in the town. His name is supposed to be Pierre Dupont. We are sending his prints up to Reccords and perhaps they will tell us some more about him. The rifle was an American Garrard and there were any number of them loose in France."

Hambleton went back to the hut to find that Dinel had not yet returned. Privacy being exactly what Hambleton wanted at the moment, he fastened the door, hung an old sack over the window and lifted away from the wall a large packing-case which served them as ladder and storeroom. Behind this at noon he had seen a man in a dark suit pull out his青春 to find the safety behind it empty but his groping fingers found a familiar heavy package rolled up in a length of oily flannel. His eyes were up.

"Dinel, did you injure me? There were six cartridges in the magazine when I showed it away. I wonder—"

"He pulled out the magazine from the automatic—
—and it was his own. No, four cartridges only, and there was not one in the breach. Two were missing, and two had been fired in the wood that afternoon. Not conclusive, of course, since only point three-two autometrics are not so very uncommon, but there had been six rounds in the gun two days earlier." He pulled back the safety catch and lay down. He barrel aimed the carbine-like gun. "Dear me! Discharged and not cleaned since, that settled it."

He had cleaned the automatic, reloaded it, hidden it away and replaced the packing-case before Dinel returned. When he came in the door was unlocked and the window uncovered, Hambleton was sitting in his favorite leather peeling pouzzoles and dropping them into a pot on the floor.

"But smells extremely good," said Dinel.

"Hare," said Hambleton briefly.

"All?"

"It will not be done for some time yet. There is a bottle of wine in the cellar, we might drink a little before we start west."

Dinel drank and set down his glass. "The winter-harvest is nearly done, Tictoc."

Hambleton nodded. "I understand we are to be paid off at the end of the week. It has been a pleasant interlude."

Dinel sat down upon his bedding, leaned back against the wall and伸出了 his left to the fire. "Very good. So much so that I feel inclined to stay on a little longer. We have saved money here and I imagine they will let us stay on here for a time."

"I am in no hurry to return to Paris, Dinel." Hambleton threw some more sticks on the fire and stirred the stew. "Let us refit our glasses. Good. New self me, Dinel, who did you take my gun out and put it in the wood, today?"

Dinel started, but not so convincingly as to spoil his wine.

"Your gun? I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Come off it, Dinel. Why all this fuss, are we not friends? As for the man, he was no loss. He was trying to murder one or both of those two men who are staying at the Poste and it was a good deed to prevent it."

Dinel relaxed slowly and even produced a sheepish grin.

"You are right, Tictoc. I don't know why I started it— you started me. I did know that you had a gun, Tictoc. I have seen it when you thought I was asleep but I never spoke of it from motives of delicacy, Tictoc. Since you didn't mention it, I would not."

"Thank you, Dinel, that was like you. But what prompted you to take it this afternoon?"

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"I have been uneasy ever since I saw that dead man at the chateau. There are dangerous people about here, Tictoc. When I was preparing to go out this afternoon it came over me suddenly that unless I had the gun I could not go out. Besides, there is the pot. I thought if I saw a peasant it would be good eating and that was the second motive, Tictoc. Where did you get the people?"

"Bought it. Dinel, you are an excellent shot. One in the shoulder and the other bang through the head, so they say in the town."

"Oh, I can shoot," said Dinel indifferently. "It was like this, Tictoc. I was working my way up through the country, carrying a sack of grain from the chateau, running, and he carried a rifle. He knew that? I thought he looked dangerous so I followed him quickly, I learned how to do that—oh, a long time ago. He went on to the edge of the wood, hid behind a tree and waited, and very soon those two from the Poste came strolling up the hill. When they were within range he fired at them, then ran away. Tictoc, I could not stand there and see them shot down."

* * *

Hambleton went to Paris to see Letord, travelling in the Rolls driven by Det.-Sgt. Martin. Forgan and Campbell went with them, not that they particularly wanted to, but because it was the only time Martin's conscience would not permit him to leave them behind to be shot at. They were deposited in the Place de la Concorde and told to be good until 6 p.m.

Letord's welcome of Hambleton was as warm as ever; when it became clear that he was alone the conversation became extremely friendly.

"Now tell me about everything," he said. "Begin at the point when you last walked out of this room and go straight on till you returned here 10 minutes ago."

Hambleton obeyed while Letord sat at his desk smoking a thin black cigar, making notes from time to time and sipping a glass of red wine.

"We have at least 150,000 francs," finished Hambleton.

"We have at least 150,000 francs," the d'Alroy Circus of some of its lesser twigs, Gaston, in the Passage St. Vincent. That fellow who took Campbell for a nice drive and swallowed his own dope—"

Letord nodded and supplied a name. "Monsieur Campbell was quite right, this man's portrait was unique. I produced from my pretty picture gallery. He was concerned in that kidnapping case at Biarritz."

Hambleton nodded. "There is also Pierre Dupont who was shot dead yesterday, but not by Martin. I handed in his tabs on my way up here."

"They could be identified by now," said Letord, and assisted himself to another glass of red wine. "Oh, I remember. You thank me. I will tell you, but not at this precise moment. The man is now dead, by the way." He put back the receiver. "That one is a man whom we wanted for robbery with violence in Paris 10 years ago. He spent a long time in jail before that for murder and was discharged in 1945. Next, please."

Lucien Mabane, the man who owned the chateau. He does not come out much but one sees him occasionally. See him turn into the Happy Traveller at midday yesterday."

"Ingo Cohn from Manteselles wants him for child murder."

And there is Jean Artaud, the man with his nose bent forward. He is a man of superior education and appearance. I have seen him in Braune but he may live in Dijon. Someone was trying to sell him a wireless set in a cafe there."

"We do not know Artaud," said Letord. "He wrote the name on his pad and decorated it with a frame of horns, hoofs and gilded tails."

"But I still have no idea who the one man I was sent to find, the organizing head of the d'Alroy gang—"

"But you think the chateau—"

"I am perfectly sure that the Chateau des Colomes is the centre of all this, but that's not to say that the house necessarily lives there."

First of all, the chateau.

"Mademoiselle Tabarot and a bonne-tout-faire, very deaf. And, of course, hitherto but not henceforward, Pierre Dupont the odd-job man. Letord, I have my doubts about that Tabarot woman. She keeps herself to herself and doesn't show herself at all friendly in the town though she lived there till she was 14 and must remember quite a lot of

the people. They remember her all right. The chateau is a rambling place. I suppose it might conceivably be used for purposes of which she knew nothing."

"What? A woman in her own house? People coming and going, and she does not hear or see? Nonsense," said Letord explosively.

Then it is a question of the telephone from home the night the fellow was shot and dropped down the well. She may be blackmailed into keeping quiet."

"People are," agreed Letord. "In the meantime, I have got hold of someone who might be able to help you." He picked up the telephone. "Is Madame Guy there?" Bring her up, please, Madame Guy." He added that he had the trouble of replacing the receiver, "was the concession of a pair of fine seats to the Opera which belonged to the Tabarots until mademoiselle sold them after the war. The Tabarots lived there themselves until they ran away from the Gestapo and so did Martha Perrain."

Madame Guy was shown into the room, a round-faced woman in the 50's with a pleasant expression. "I'm sorry, monsieur," said Letord, "but you would now tell monsieur all that you were told on the other day about the Tabarot family in Paris."

Madame settled herself plumply in a chair and turned her frank gaze upon Hambleton.

"Monsieur, there was a block of flats just off the Avenue de l'Opera where my mother was consequently born and brought up. My mother and my father were killed at Verdun in the first world war. The block of flats belong to an old, old lady who was some relation to Monsieur Tabarot, so that when she died he inherited the property, that would be in 1926 or '27, I am not sure. So they left their place in the country and came to Paris to live in the same flat that the old lady had lived in. I remember it well. I was 14 then, and my mother was anxious lest the new owners should prefer a new concierge. However, they made no change, so all well, Dieu merci!"

"And the family?" prompted Hambleton.

"Monsieur Tabarot very stiff, a man old for his age; Madame troubled herself much about her husband, not so much about her children. There was a maid named Sophie-Josephine, 14 years old and very decided in all her ways. For her, everything was right or wrong, white or black."

"A tiresome child, one feels," Hambleton murmured.

"Lucien, four years younger, he was quite different, so shy and friendly, if one spoke to him he did not mind at all. She said he was silly in the head, but that did not matter, monsieur."

"Not true at all."

"Not at all, for when he went to school he did very well with all the other boys about him, yes, indeed."

"Then there came the second war?"

"Als, yes, and everything was terrible. The Germans came and occupied Paris, and Monsieur Lucien, he was a young man by then, he left home and joined the Resistance. He was captured and was very steeped at it and remained the Gestapo very much, though I do not know how monstrous."

Lucien Labant kept away from them since he would only endanger them to have any contact with him. It was quite dangerous enough in those days to have a relative in the Resistance, but he was very steeped in it and remained the Gestapo very much, though I do not know how monstrous."

The flat filled up with strangers, and were so crowded it was horrible. Almost the only ones still there were the three Tabarots and a young woman named Martha Perrain, who had a small flat below theirs. She was not so very young, about 30 perhaps, and she had lived there some years. For me, I never liked her; she had a hard face. I thought she was rather like a she-wolf which to me was repellent. She was not of the type you understand, with whom one would expect the Tabarots to be at all intimate, but she would be on her best behavior with them, of course. Besides, there is no doubt but that she was useful to them when the poor mademoiselle had her accident."

"Mademoiselle Tabarot?"

"Yes, yes, monsieur. She was knocked down in the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, and lay there for hours with her right leg quite smashed, monsieur. They took her to hospital to set it and she came home all in plaster and helpless. Did one what could, and a music came in at first, and Martha Perrain helped very much, yes, she did. It is only right that one should admit that. She would do their shopping

for them or go to the doctor for what was wanted."

"The doctor," said Hambleton.

"Dr. Petiot, monsieur," for he had a surgery just around the corner in the Rue Cambronne. He was accused of terrible things later on and I believe he was guillotined for murder, but he was very attentive to the poor ma'melle. I saw him often when he was here. Madame Guy's kindly face darkened "Marthe Perrain and he became very friendly from that time on."

"I suppose it was some months before Mademoiselle Taborot could walk at all."

"Many, many months. Marthe Perrain had work before the war in a beauty salon and then she was in a shop and then she had to leave, early in 1943, to work in Dr. Petiot's nursing home up near the Etoule in the Rue Lassus, that was after she burned her hand. She upset a pan of hot fat over her left hand and burned it, ah, badly! I heard her scream and I rushed up and she was in agony, truly. I ran for Dr. Petiot and he came, he healed very well but there was a scar of the singularity, the scar was her height scarlet and the hand was standing up. Time wear on for—how can I tell?—another year. Yes, yes, in the summer of 1943 the Gestapo came and interrogated the Taborots about their son, Monsieur Lucien. Then the Germans went away and I went up and they were all as it was at the door of death from fright. The old man, he was so frightened, he ran out of Paris and go to Bourne where their own people would conceal them, and they bid me telephone to Marthe Perrain to come and help them, as I did."

"She came, did she?"

"Yes, monsieur, and she agreed that they must get away at once, for the Gestapo, they will find them, and so we picked up all their valuable and small things and two days later they went away and I never saw them again, monsieur, not even after the war."

Madame Guy smiled and wiped her eyes, which were tearful at the last. "I think I have told you everything, monsieur, and if not, Monsieur Letord knows."

She was thanked, complimented, escorted off the premises and sent home in a police car. Hambleton and Letord, alone in the office, looked at each other.

"And there are people," said Hambleton, "who do not believe in the devil. That Marthe Perrain—"

"I am a good Roman Catholic," said Letord, and surprisingly crossed himself. "I believe what I am told."

"Letord, wherever the woman is at the Chateau des Colomes, it is not the Taborot daughter. The woman at the chateau wills with long swinging strides and has never been lame in her life."

"I have seen the scar on the back of her left hand, she is probably Marthe Perrain," said Letord. "She could have impersonated Mademoiselle Taborot to the police when she reported the old people missing. Moreover, she must find a new identity for herself—when Petiot is discovered and no doubt the Taborots told her all about Beauseine."

"Yes. But even if it is Marthe Perrain, it is not to say that she is the head of the d'Alroy Circus."

"No, indeed, but what a handle for blackmail if one wished to make use of the chateau, hein? You suggested that yourself. What will you do now?"

"Return to Beauseine," said Hambleton, "and go on digging."

CHAPTER IX

HAMBLETON went back to Beauseine in the Rolls with Martin, Campbell and Forgan, taking it in turns to drive. They reached Beauseine a little after 11 and Hambleton had prepared a story to tell Dinel in their but if he should ask. But Dinel was wrapped in rags and his coat and barely stirred when Hambleton went in. He had been very quiet for some time past, as Hambleton had noticed.

On the next morning, having no longer any work to do, Hambleton, somewhat reluctantly, on the back door of the police station and asked to see the chief of police. He was shown in and offered cigarettes and a glass of wine.

"I have something to tell you," said Hambleton. "I saw Monsieur Letord in Paris yesterday and he agrees that you should be told." Hambleton took

a preliminary sip of wine, lit a cigarette, leaned back in his chair and gave the chief a crisp pyre of Mme. Guy's evidence from first to last.

The chief listened in silence, only, as the tale drew to its close, his jaw came forward and two little muscles twitched at its angles.

"Do you happen to know, Monsieur le Chef, whether the woman at the chateau has the scar of a burn on her left hand?"

"I do not. She wear gloves, always, as women of the better class habitually do. But, if your witness yesterday is to be believed, she cannot be Mademoiselle Taborot. She is an impersonator. What puzzle me is that the people here have accepted her as she is, know her well."

"She left Bourne when she had the scar?"

"I see. And women change as they grow up, yes?"

"Precisely," said Hambleton. "But, Monsieur le Chef, none of this is much help in the problem which brought me here, which is to find the leader of the d'Alroy Circus. That woman is, perhaps, blackmailing into lending them the chateau as a headquarters."

"She would be a good subject for blackmail?"

"Yes, indeed. In the watches of the night," said Hambleton. "I had what may possibly be a helpful thought. I won't put it higher than that. There must be messages sent out from the chateau, to gang members elsewhere. I was wondering whether we could not find new names and addresses, or even telephone numbers. I wonder whether I could talk to the postmaster?"

"I have no doubt we could approach him," said the chief. "Such matters are confidential, but between us we might persuade him."

Ten minutes later Hambleton was in the private room of an incredulous and faintly resentful postmaster.

"I have seen this—this person about the man," he said. "Am I indeed to understand that he is a person of credit?"

"Certainly," said the chief of police stoutly. "This matter, which we have now upon our carpet, is of the greatest importance. We must get to the bottom of it. We would not be here at all. If you can assist—"

The postmaster closed his eyes as one who would really prefer not to see what sat before him.

"If the monsieur will ask his questions."

Hambleton went straight to the point.

"The Chateau des Colomes is connected with the telegraphic service. I know, because I have seen the man go in and out of the house. Do the residents of the chateau make much use of the telephone?"

"No, monsieur."

"I meant, actually, long-distance calls rather than local ones."

"So I assumed, monsieur. They do, indeed, occur, but not often. They are sent, I believe, to the Bourne telegraphic, though normally the elderly man who does the gardening comes down with a basket and a list of requirements, and, more rarely, the old, very deaf woman servant comes. It is, indeed," said the postmaster, looking away into an unblended distance, "something of a mystery that the chateau maintains a telephone service at all, they use it only for long-distance calls, no."

"Oh. Many letters?"

"Letters? No. Very few letters."

"Oh," said Hambleton, rather deflated. "Possibly Mademoiselle Taborot communicates by telepathy."

"There is also," said the postmaster coldly, "the telegraphic service, useful in communicating with persons in the vicinity on the telephone."

Hambleton apologized.

"Do they use that method?"

"More than any other. These telegrams are not telephoned to this office from the Chateau des Colomes, they are always written out in full upon telegraph forms and brought here by the gardener referred to earlier, I believe that his name was Pierre Dusont. He is, I understand, now dead, having suffered a heart attack up on the hill the day before yesterday."

"That is correct," said the chief of police.

"Tell me about these telegrams," said Hambleton. "Are they sent out singly, or to a number of people at once, or—"

"Sometimes one and sometimes several. Last Friday, I remember, there were six."

"I suppose," began Hambleton, "he was interrogated by the postmaster, who seemed to have taken a dislike to him."

"There were two curious points about these telegrams," he said, firmly addressing the chief of police. "One was that whenever there was more

than one, the telegrams were all the same. Except, of course, for the names and addresses the messages were identical. The other curious point was that always, every time, the vendange was mentioned. Since our wine harvest occurs only in September, it seemed to me—though I am not a famous detective—peculiar to have it referred to in February or April or January."

"What did the chief, did this formula suggest to you?"

"In my own mind I thought that ma'melle was playing the stock markets. Not that it was any business of mine."

"But it is mine," continued the chief, with a glance at Hambleton. "She was using a pre-arranged code, of course. Did all the telegrams go to Paris?"

"By no means. Three to Paris, if my memory serves me, one to Marseilles, one to Lyon and one to Lille."

"I suppose," said Hambleton, musing, "that you have the originals of these telegrams?"

"I may have, monsieur. I will cause a search to be made."

"Shall we wait? Or come back in an hour's time?"

"No, no," said the postmaster. "I will search at once and send you what I can find across to your office in a sealed envelope."

Hambleton went to the police station by appointment an hour later.

"Any luck with the telegrams?"

"The postmaster rang up to say that he had found some and that he would send them across shortly. Sit down, Monsieur Hambleton, it cannot take long to wait."

A moment later he came in with a stout envelope addressed to the chief of police and heavily sealed. It contained about a dozen telegraph forms of which six bore the date of Feb. 14; the others, in hags and threes, were of later dates. The messages varied slightly on different dates but they all mentioned vendange and a Friday, "Come to the vendange on Friday," said the six in February. The chief of police and Hambleton looked through them together.

"There are only six names after all," said the chief. "These later ones are to some of the people we against. Is it not odd that there is here no Magne, no Artaux, no—"

"Beauseine, of course," said Tommy Hambleton cheerfully. "These telegram-receivers are the rascals in more distant fields, don't you agree? I am so glad that you do. Have you, by any chance, any telegraph forms in stock?"

"What," said the chief, scrabbling at the back of a stationery drawer. "Did you propose doing?"

"Today is Monday. Let us send out a general call to the six gentlemen severally referred to in these documents, being careful to refer to the vendange. They will then, we trust, all arrive here on Friday and we can see how they run and cut off their tails with a carving-knife. Eh? Good. How shall we word it?"

"I don't think it matters much about the exact wording, so long as it means the vendange," said the chief, looking over Hambleton's shoulder.

When the forms were all completed, the chief packed them up. "I will send—no, I will take these across myself. I feel that they will get a better reception than if you, monsieur, were to take them." "I am quite sure that you are right. Tell me one more thing, monsieur. Is there any legal or customary objection to a postman carrying an honest frame carrying luggage from the station for passengers who arrive?"

"No by-laws, but it would not do to tread on the toes of anyone in uniform, or the taxi drivers picking up fares and so on."

"Of course not, monsieur. I think I'll start tomorrow and then by Friday everyone will be used to the sight of me. After all, now, the vendange is at an end, a poor man must do something to scrape up a few francs."

"It is heavy work, monsieur." "I'll pick out the light ones," grinned Tommy Hambleton.

He went back to the hot night with some strips of quite passable steak for Dinel to toast before the fire and was in time to help him peel the potatoes.

"It is a little sad, isn't it?" said Hambleton, "that the vendange is now over here in Beauseine?"

"You enjoyed it in the end, did you not? Al-

though you grumbled so at the hard work when we started, feel those potatoes thinner—you are wasting them."

"Yes, I did enjoy it. There is something about the wine harvest which takes one back to a golden age of classical culture!"

"Rubbish," said Dinel firmly, "absolute rubbish. The golden age was always a century or more even to the French. It is a very thin, thin modern age. Even a myth will not live up to these present days. It retreats farther into its laurel thickets and lets us go on alone."

Hambledon was so surprised as to be almost speechless. Dinel had always been something of a mystery but so stiffly mannered, so keen, the steersman and the dove not brother, but they seldom include a knowledge of Gothic architecture and a classical education. He changed the subject.

During the next three days Beaune became accustomed to seeing a bearded tramp hanging about the railway station offering to carry any luggage which was plain and not too heavy. He was not anxious to try and upset the rules of established custom. He was evidently poor and he spoke of filling in a week or two before returning to Paris. He was, therefore, allowed to pick up, in the matter of small jobs at the station, the crumbs that fell from rich men's tables.

On Friday, he was away all day and met every train that came in. The time dragged rather slowly. Some time in the afternoon Dinel passed the station on one of his aimless rambles, he merely raised a hand in greeting and did not stay to speak.

Eventually the 7.15 pm train from Paris came in and from it six men alighted in a sort of loose group together, suggesting a party of tourists or travellers together. They did not keep together as travellers; they drifted off in twos and threes, with one exception they carried only the lightest luggage in the form of small attaché cases such as it would be an insult to a man to offer to carry for him. The sixth man carried two suitcases which were not large but obviously heavy, he lagged behind the others and preceded the only change. Tommy stopped and said up to him, "Carry your bags, monsieur?"

"What? I'm afraid they're a bit heavy."

"Where to, monsieur?"

"To the Happy Traveller."

"Happy Traveller, monsieur, good, monsieur."

The traveller and his two bags down, threw back his shoulders with a sigh of relief, lit a cigarette and strolled off. Hambledon picked up the bags, groaned inwardly and followed after.

At a street crossing the traveller and his porter passed a policeman on point duty who looked at them just a second longer, than is normal in a policeman on point duty.

At the bottom of the hill upon which stands the Happy Traveller, they passed a chauffeur very smart in uniform who took not the slightest notice of either of them.

The traveller must have been a human man by nature or when it did not coincide with his personal interests, for he looked around and saw his porters exhausted and lagging behind, he stopped till Hambledon came up.

"Take it easy, old man," said the traveller. "Stop a bit and get your breath. Sorry about the bags, that's the worst of books. They do weigh heavy. Isn't that the Happy Traveller up there on the right?"

"Yes, monsieur," said the porter, wiping his face.

"I'll go on up and you follow on. I reckon you've earned a drink on the top of your pay and you shall have one up there. Take your time, old chap."

Hambledon thanked him and the traveller walked on and disappeared into the entrance of the Happy Traveller, glancing back as he did so.

When he finally staggered into the Happy Traveller all six men were at the bar, and Hambledon's employer was looking out for him. He came across the room and led Hambledon—still burdened—up to the bar. Hambledon set down the two cases on the bar and then performed a sort of *ritual*. His employer, a stout and squat man with a coarse skin, ordered the long drink of beer for which Hambledon asked and then drew the two cases close to his own feet. The first glass of beer merely fizzed slightly as it went down, the stout man laughed kindly and ordered another. Hambledon thanked him and took that one much more slowly. The six men were talking casually

together as men do who do not know each other well; Hambledon's stout employer, in particular, seemed to be almost a stranger to the other five. The proprietor of the Happy Traveller dodged up and down the bar filling the orders, with beady black eyes watching everyone.

Presently there was the sound of a car pulling up outside, one of the most glided lily out of the window and uttered an exclamation, whereupon some of the others also turned around and comments became general.

"A veritable museum-piece."

"Someone has bought it in the Flea-Market."

"Senseless," said another, a man of the type who is always ready to argue. "Museum-piece? Is an English Rolls, and probably extremely valuable."

Hambledon did not look around but noticed with interest that at the words "English Rolls" the patron behind the bar awoke to startled life and came around the bar to look out of the window. The next moment the door opened and Campbell came in, closest friend of Forgan; then they walked up to the bar and the proprietor turned to serve them. Forgan ordered two glasses of wine and discussed with the proprietor what it should be while Campbell looked at everyone, including Hambledon, with a wide and silly smile.

"This room," said the proprietor in a low voice, "is perhaps a little crowded for the messieurs?" He jolted back from the bar. "I will open the door to the outside," he said, "and you may have a window looking down the valley. It is more private if the messieurs would prefer it."

"Thank you," said Forgan. "It would perhaps be better."

"This way," said the proprietor, and opened the door behind the bar. He then bent to lift the flap of the back counter to let them pass, and Campbell drifted through, looking about him.

A few minutes later the proprietor came back and walked across the room and out at the front door to speak to the driver of the Rolls.

"The messieurs say, do not wait for them. They will walk back to the town when they are ready."

"Very good," said the driver, with a change of countenance. He started the engine of the Rolls and drove smoothly away toward the town.

A few minutes later two of the party at the far side of the room finished their wine and said that they supposed they must be going on. They came up to the bar and for their drinkmills in their pocket found a token, too small for him to see, and passed whatever it was to the proprietor. He opened the flap with one hand, with the other, seized the two objects into a box under the bar—a tin box; the small sharp rattles were unmistakable. The two men nodded, opened the further door for themselves and went out, shouting after them. They were plainly men who had been there before on business of a way.

The next day, so went Hambledon's employer, who came to him and paid him, with a friendly word, returned to the bar and paid there and then picked up his heavy little suitcases. Hambledon immediately ambled across but was waved away.

"No, thanks, I can manage now."

He also gave some small object to the proprietor and was passed on through the door at the back. Men do not like to be regarded as beggars, especially when they have a special unimportant and momentary errand. Hambledon waited for him to come back but he did not; instead, another pair went out behind the bar with another passing of tokens, if that were what they were, and more tiny rattles as the things fell in the box. The last man ambled across and paid him, and then, when the box was thrown back for him but he looked at the proprietor and said: "Where do I get?"

"Oh! You're new, aren't you? Down the stairs and it's the third bin on the left—I'd best come and show you."

They went out together and Hambledon was left for the moment alone in the bar. He slipped around the end of it and looked where there was a tin box on the floor, half buried in the earth. He picked one out and went back to his corner.

Hambledon felt in his pocket for a short length of black thread, slipped it through the ring and tied the token around his forearm, pushing it out of sight. When the proprietor came back, Hambledon asked him the time.

"Ten minutes before 21 hours."

"So far as that, I suppose I'd better get along to this conference."

He moved along the bar to open the flap but the man had his hand upon it.

"The seen you in here before."

"Why not? I hope you will again. I saw you didn't recognize me, but you probably wouldn't with all this hair on my face." Hambledon was speaking good Paris French and the man said: "Come on, open the flap," said Hambledon. "It shall be late."

"But then—what you have to show?"

"Oh, sorry, I forgot." Hambledon pushed up his sleeve and brought the token into view. "This knot won't come—oh, yes, it will. Here you are. Is it still the third bin on the left?"

"Yes, monsieur. Everything is the same."

Hambledon did, and went up the same door as all the others; even as he turned in the doorway to shut it after him he saw the front door of the cafe opening and Dinel in the act of coming in. Hambledon did not wait, he had come enough upon his plate at the moment without adding Dinel.

He turned around him, he was in a sort of back hall, dark-floored, with various doors opening from it; he glanced into storerooms and a kitchen and scullery, all unattended at the moment and holding no sign of Forgan or Campbell. Near by, a flight of brick stairs led down to darkness below.

Hambledon pattered down the stairs, torch in hand, the place was dark and he did not expect. The walls were lined with wire racks, nearly all full of bottles. What was it—the third bin on the left?

The third bin was plainly dimly when one's attention had once been drawn to it, the wire racks covered a door and not the solid wall. Normally it would have been outlined by a bright light but here, Hambledon laid his hand upon the door, it opened silently upon further darkness within and Hambledon passed through.

After a moment he switched on his torch again and saw that he was in a small cellar with a passage leading on, at the end of this eight or 10 wide, shallow steps going upwards to another door standing open. Within this dark width was a sort of platform, a small platform on the floor of the room. This was so large that Hambledon's little pencil torchlight died in the dark before it reached a wall, he swung the light around on pillars and roof. Fourteenth century at a guess, or even earlier. These were the original wine cellars of the Chateau des Colomnes, subterranean Beaune is honeycombed with such.

He went on through the direction was no longer obvious. Since they were following the contour of a hill upwards, there should be another flight of steps very—

His torch went out.

* * *

As Dinel entered the front door of the Happy Traveller he did, in fact, both see and recognize his companion Tector going out through the back door, but he made no sign and asked no question. He walked up the bar and ordered a glass of wine and the proprietor responded by demanding payment of the wine, a service charge.

Presently the proprietor came out from behind the bar, crossed over to the window and looked out; an odd thing to do since it was dark outside except for the Happy Traveller's own terrace lights. Some people have an uneasy sense which tells them that the next winter will be a bad one, a similar sense informs them of approaching police. Perhaps the proprietor was one of these last and certainly there were plenty of police approaching. They were surrounding the place, including the Chateau des Colomnes, on all sides, and it would be more than unfortunate if the proprietor saw any of them in the dark. Dinel went on drinking.

He finished his wine, set the glass down heavily enough to attract attention, slipped along the bar and opened the flap. The proprietor looked around and jumped to the natural conclusion that the rough-looking tramp had designs on the till.

The proprietor hurried across the room like a charging bull, prepared to lunge and kick which would get the tramp in hand for a moment. Unfortunately for the proprietor, the tramp had had both instruction and practice in unarmed combat and was much more active than he looked. The kick was wide of the mark, the tramp moved quickly and unexpectedly and the proprietor sailed through the air to land deceptively upon a small table and two light chairs in the corner. Dined well

over and looked at him with professional interest. His hair cold and white remain so far some time. The police could have him."

Dinel turned on his heel and went about his business.

* * *

Hambledon 'shook the torch but there was not even a flash. Someone had opened a door somewhere, though no light was visible, and Hambledon was completely lost. He listened and heard no sound; he felt that he was not alone but that might have been his imagination.

"What I want," he murmured in the intense whisper, "is a luminous compass." At that point he gasped very much more loudly than he had spoken, because a hand was laid upon his arm and another voice spoke in the faintest murmur.

"Not that way, monsieur; there is a well. Three more steps and you are in." This way?"

"Oh, said Hambledon, "Thank you."

"Sh-sh. Not to speak."

The man knew his way very well, and that was a little odd because, although his voice was pitched so low as to be almost inaudible, it still reminded Tommy of Dinet's. Unlikely, but just possible—if a man had a little time to himself he could round up a little history and know a barrel. A very natural object in a cellar beneath a wine-yard, but Hambledon traced his fingers across the top of it and shuddered so convulsively that his guide noticed it.

"What's the matter?" he breathed.

"Barrel—with cellar."

With your products of Chateau industry, charming people, you know. Two paces forward and then up the stairs. The door just opposite. Quite safe with care, lock has been oiled. Inside, there is all the trouble monsieur could wish to find."

Hambledon received the gentlest push on his arm, the next moment his guide had gone.

* * *

Hambledon took two steps forward and kicked against some obstruction. He learned carefully forward and found it to be the bottom step of a flight of stone stairs worn into a hollow. After it stops the stones changed for wood. The stairs were narrow and steep. He plodded on and presently came to the staircase upon a passage running both ways. Here it was not completely dark and he could see that there was a door facing him. He laid his hand very carefully upon the heavy iron handle which yielded at once without a sound. It had indeed been silent and so had the sound. For the door was open and in complete silence.

He found himself upon a wooden gallery some 15 feet above the floor of the room it overlooked, a beautiful room, panelled all around and with a wide, open fireplace at the farther end. It was lit below by electric lights hanging upon long cords from the ceiling. These had green glass shades, so that while Hambledon was in deep shadow the room below was brightly lit.

It had a long and immensely heavy oak table down the middle; at the end of this in a large oak chair there sat a woman with black hair drawn straight back from strong, angular features. She had her hands upon the table before her. Even when Hambledon was within a foot of her he saw that the back of her left hand bore deep purple scars. There were nine men sitting at the table they were so much beneath Hambledon that it was difficult for him to recognize them with any certainty, but there were two more men about whom there could be no mistake: Forgan and Campbell sprawled upon a great, extremely ugly settle against that wall to the left. They were tied up with ropes and appeared to be unconscious.

Mademoiselle, at the head of the table, was addressing the meeting as Hambledon entered.

"—say you did not send those telegrams and I believe you if only because none of you knows all the addresses. I do not send them. They did not know that we were here till Pissard rang up from the Happy Traveller, the man who usually sent them—he knew your address—he is dead. He was shot."

Someone asked who did that.

"I don't know. There have been several awkward things happening lately. Baptiste—I sent him out to do a job and he had a road accident and was picked up by the police. Then he was sent home so he had to leave. There was Pissard, too, lost. Now there is Lucien Tabarot over there," she nodded toward the settle, "with his attendant. They must go. We will see to that in a minute, but first I want

to say that I think we should all scatter. I suggest that we do not meet again for at least three months. Ah, yes, Vasin?" She was addressing the squat man whose heavy cases Hambledon had carried from the station. "You have brought with you the proceeds of the Swiss job, have you?"

"Yes, mademoiselle. They are there, against the wall by the fire, in Golde's safe."

"I told you that it would be gold bars. Very good. I will get rid of them as quickly as I can and then send each of you your share by post as usual."

Madame had a hard and incisive voice and even while the men around the table murmured assent, Hambledon found time to consider that the profits of this organization must be good indeed to induce this bunch of scoundrels to be getting addressed as though they were morally defiled. He was disconcerted by a female with a face like a vulture.

"Is the current ready mixed, Jules?" she asked.

"In the barrels, mademoiselle."

"Very well. You will put them in the barrels and then they can be stored in the cellars with the others. Better finish them off first, Magid."

Magid rose to his feet from his place just below. Dinet and stalked slowly across the room, dragging his gun. He went to the barrels and the bell声 of the stems sang out merrily at Magid as he came, and the woman at the head of the table stood up; even as Hambledon drew his automatic he wondered why, and then it dawned upon him. She wanted to see them shot.

Magid began to talk in that gentle, reassuring voice of his.

"I am so sorry, truly, but this has to be. This will not harm us at all, indeed, you will not feel it."

Hambledon rested his Luger upon the rail of the gallery, took careful aim and shot Magid straight through the head.

There was an immediate uproar among the party below, who all sprang to their feet, except the woman, who sat down abruptly. The next moment Hambledon nearly followed her example as a loud and imperative voice rang through the hall below.

"Sh-down! Put your hands up! Messieurs, madame, sell your hands up that you are arrested."

Hambledon, who had been watching the door as it closed as a figure stalled in through a doorway, Dinel, unimpressively Dinel, through his police and his manner were different. His head was up and his shoulders straight, he looked very much younger and surprisingly masterful. He held in his hands a long and elaborate pin-fire revolver, a cavalry revolver, made in 1886. The men around the table obeyed; all but one, who moved and ran. There was a thunderous bang, the man was Jean Ariants—spun around and crashed to the floor, for the bullet had hit him in the shoulder.

"It works," said Dinel delightedly. "Messieurs, madame, you see that it works. Wonderful what you can pick up in antique shops in *Blasé*." He strolled around to the side of the table to face the woman, who had sat down and was now in the position to behave yourselves; for beside me there is also I think, a friend of mine in the gallery. I am glad to be here to see the end of this mystery, shall we call it the Mystery of the Chateau des Colonnes? One mystery concerns you, madame. You pose as the Mademoiselle Marthe Jeanne Tabarot but you are not. She died a long time ago at the hands of dear, kind Dr. Pissard and I've only just found that out. You were a friend of mine, were you not? And now you're in a little more trouble because her brother turns up, you were going to put him in the cement barrel, weren't you, but you won't now. For one thing, you won't have time, the police will be here in a moment. For

another, you've got another shock coming. That man is no more a Tabarot than you are. He's another impostor, ay dear magdane."

The woman sprang to her feet.

"Who the devil are you?"

Dinel bowed and waved the revolver gracefully.

"Lucien Tabarot, very much at your service, madame. I'm sure you mistake that name for me, may be have it's little easier to remember I'm young but I was never so completely goodly as that. You ought to have known better than that, we met several times before the war, did we not? I think that you are Marthe Perrain, are you not? Never mind, here come the police, we can see all that out presently."

The police rushed in at several doors and rounded to the company; Hambledon ran down the stairs and shook Dinel warmly by the hand.

"Thank you very much, Dinel, you've been a great help."

"Ah, Tictoc! And, while we are clearing up mysteries, who the devil are you?"

Hambledon told him. "I came down here to treat these gallants kindly to you. I've done it."

"Ah, you are, and never general as to who and what you were but I never thought of that one. And who is my impersonator, now being ousted by the kindly police?"

"One of my assistants."

"Indeed? I take it that distract manner is, in spite of fact, assumed?" Hambledon snorted. Dinet laughed and then, looked thoughtfully around the room.

"I never meant to come back here, Tictoc—except me! I thought my sister was living comfortably here and I didn't want to disturb her. Or live with her, either. It was only when—Lucie madame there and knew she wasn't Marie-Joséphine that I decided to take a hand."

"That was the day we were squirming in the vineyard mademoiselle, we were carrying our arms on the road with a man behind her carrying her bag. I thought something had startled her."

"Starred? You pain me, Tictoc. Given food for thought, perhaps, but you can't truthfully say I looked startled."

"You looked as though someone had just banged you on the head, that's all. I'm not a fool, Mr. Hostile Dinel—I mean Tabarot—it was from that moment that I thought there was something fishy about mademoiselle."

Dinel grunted and turned to watch the last of the d'Alroy Circus being led away.

"I'm not," continued Hambledon. "I suppose you'll have the place cleaned and garnished, decommissioned and rechristened."

"And the well cleaned out."

"As you say, and then settle down quietly for the rest of a happy and useful life."

"I don't know, Tictoc. I don't know. I had a bad time during the war. It wasn't all fun being in the Resistance. I can't settle down. I asked about my sister and heard that they were among Pissard's travellers, that they had been captured, you know. I thought my sister had survived and I wanted nothing to do with her. So I went on the trump and now I've come to like it. It's the only life Tictoc, where nobody has any control over you at all. None. Wonderful. There used to be a captain over here where the drinks were kept."

He walked across and examined a little door swinging below the gallery and presently a little door swinging open.

"My father tanned me when I was eight for finding out how this worked. My goodness, it hasn't been touched! A Pommard 1929, Tictoc, on your knees. And here are even some of my father's glasses. And, of course, a cork-screw."

"I can sit down now, Dinel, some time later. I don't think the winter is coming before long and I think I shall take a little stroll all down the Rhone valley to Marseilles and the Côte d'Azur."

"May the sun shine for you," said Hambledon.

"Thank you. But I shall come back sometimes, you know. I shall come back for the vendange next year and the next and always. Consider this Pommard. It's mine, I've possessed mine since. Tictoc, will you come back next year and stay with me here for the vendange? And we will smell crushed grapes again and get stung by wasps in most inaccessable places—is it a promise?"

"It's a promise," said Tommy Hambledon.

THE END

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